

OCTOBER 1998

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# China

C H I N A T O U R I S M



## TRAVERSING THE FORMIDABLE LOP NUR

THE VAST BAIYANGDIAN LAKE  
IN NORTH CHINA

VISITING VILLAGES IN YUNNAN

BE AN EIGHTH ROUTE ARMY SOLDIER  
AT HUANGYA PASS

219

ISSN 1025-577X





# CHINA NATIONAL ARTS & CRAFTS IMP. & EXP. CORP.

SAGACITY CREATION CIVILIZATION RECIPROCATION



**MANAGEMENT**  
**PRESIDENT:** Chen Kun

**VICE PRESIDENT:** Jin Rongjuan Huang Shijue

**ACONT GENERAL:** Kong Xiangpei **VICE PRESIDENT:** Yu Jiasheng



## BUSINESS ACHIVEMENT:

Total turnover of import and export in 1996 reached 1,495,250,000 US Dollars. Now it is the 16th on the list of 500 biggest i/e enterprises.

## EXPORT COMMODITIES:

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## IMPORT COMMODITIES:

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# 山東工藝品進出口(集團)股份有限公司

**SHANDONG ARTS & CRAFTS IMP. & EXP. (GROUP) CO., LTD.**



Shandong Arts & Crafts I/E Corp. has transformed into Shandong Arts & Crafts Imp. & Exp. (Group) Co., Ltd. since 1994 (hereinafter referred to as Shandong Arts & Crafts).

With more than 40 years of steady development Shandong Arts & Crafts has established one integral group of enterprises engaged in business trade, manufacturing, processing, storage, forwarding, container transportation, real estate, commerce and service and service respectively. Furthermore Shandong

Arts & Crafts has built up very close business relations with more than 1000 customers in about 70 states and regions of the world. At the same time Shandong Arts & Crafts maintains a good co-operation with domestic suppliers. With an annual export value of US\$160,000,000 Shandong Arts & Crafts has been listed No.122 among the 500 largest import and export enterprises in China.

Shandong Arts & Crafts mainly deals in the commodities such as straw products, willow products, reed products, human hair products, ceramics, glasswares, embroidery, textile & garments, hats & shoes, furniture, diamond, pearls & jewels, gifts & toys, artificial flowers, carpets, gifts specials, light industry products, stationery & sports goods, building materials, and act as agents for the import and export in China and abroad; handles barter trade and transit trade; undertakes joint-venture projects, co-operative management as well as compensation trade, process with samples and materials supplied; explores the domestic market the export products; expands into the real estate operations; offers information service as well as labour service.

Abided by the principle of "Customer First" Shandong Arts & Crafts will continue to supply the customers with the products in better quality by offering best service at first rate. And all the counterparts from domestic and abroad and welcome to visit our company and do business more co-operatively to both interests.



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# BEAUTIFYING LIFE AND CHALLENGE TO THE FUTURE WITH ZHEJIANG ARTS AND CRAFTS



## ZHEJIANG ARTS & CRAFTS

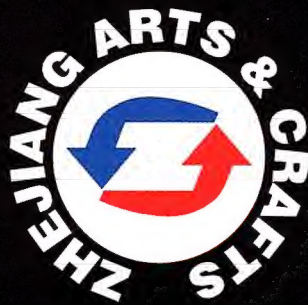
浙江省工藝品進出口公司，連續7年被國家列為500家進出口額最大的企業之一，是一個成功的企業。

浙江省是全國工藝品重點產區。浙江省工藝品進出口公司組建於1981年，在充滿變幻和艱辛的市場競爭中，“浙江工藝”以其雄厚的實力和堅韌不拔的信心，取得了輝煌的成績！

“浙江工藝”經營：抽紗品、禮品、服裝、床上用品、特藝品、日用工藝品、手套、鞋帽、蔴草製品、草麻製品、箱包、手袋玩具、古今家具、竹柳製品、傘等等。

“浙江工藝”擁有一支年富力強，精通國際貿易、勇於開拓和進取的專業人才隊伍，員工的創業和敬業精神，使公司充滿生機，推動了公司向綜合性、多元化、集團化、國際化目標邁進。

“浙江工藝”恪守“重合同、守信用”的貿易原則，以高效和熱誠為國內外客戶服務。



ZHEJIANG ARTS AND CRAFTS IMPORT AND CRAFTS CORP. is a successful enterprise by ranking herself constantly for the last 7 years among the top 500 enterprises of import and export in China.

Zhejiang Province is the key area manufacturing arts and crafts in China. Zhejiang Arts and Crafts Import and Export Corp was established in 1981. In the unpredictable and fierce market competition, Zhejiang Arts achieves a brilliant success with her solid strength and indomitable confidence.

Zhejiang Arts manufactures and exports many items such as drawn-work and embroidery, gifts, garments, home-textile, native handicrafts, daily-use arts and crafts, gloves and mittens, headwear and footwear, igusa straw products, straw and sisal products, handbags and luggages, toys, traditional furnitures, modern furnitures, bamboo and willow products, umbrellas, etc..

Zhejiang Arts has a large number of professional staff - young and vigorous, well experienced in international trade, aggressive and progressive. With the creative and professional spirits of the staff, the company is in its prime and full of vigor. She forges ahead towards her target of a comprehensive, multi-marketing, grouping and internationalizing enterprise.

Zhejiang Arts offers good service to her customers both at home and abroad with her sincerity and efficiency in accordance with the principle of highly respecting the contracts and keeping the promise.

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# BEAUTIFYING LIFE AND CHALLENGE TO THE FUTURE WITH ZHEJIANG ARTS AND CRAFTS



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40 years in business

US\$400 million of annual export

Trade with 50 countries and regions

A large national export enterprise



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**Trekking into the Desert Where Peng Jiamu Was Lost  
— Diary of a Journey Across Lop Nur**

*Article by Ma Yong*

**Following Yu Chunshun's Trail into Lop Nur  
— Notes on China's First Team of Female Lop Nur  
Explorers**

*Article by Lin Weisheng*

Lop Nur, at the heart of the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang, has been drawing attention from explorers, archaeologists and scientists throughout the world since the ruins of the ancient Loulan State were discovered in the early years of this century. Two heroes, the scientist Peng Jiamu and the explorer Yu Chunshun, died there during their expeditions. Nevertheless, two tourist groups successfully traversed this formidable and deadly desert.

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*Photos & article by Chan Yat Nin*

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*Photos & article by Xie Guanghui*

Baiyangdian, about 150 kilometres to the southwest of Beijing, is the largest lake in North China. The scenery is reminiscent of the charming land of rivers and canals in southern China, but the customs of the fishermen differ remarkably from those of their counterparts in the south. When villagers use cormorants to catch fish in the autumn, they go as a team, creating the incredible sight of 18 boats and dozens of birds working together on the lake.





# Shanghai Light Industrial International (Group) Corporation Limited

## REMOVAL NOTICE

We are delighted to inform you that **Shanghai Light Industrial International (Group) Corp., Ltd.**

headquarter and its subsidiary companies have moved to the New Address:

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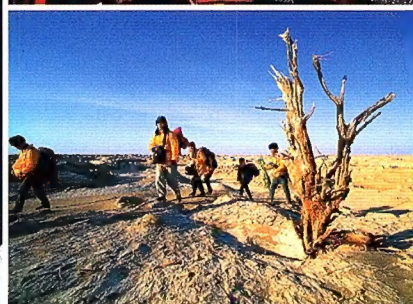
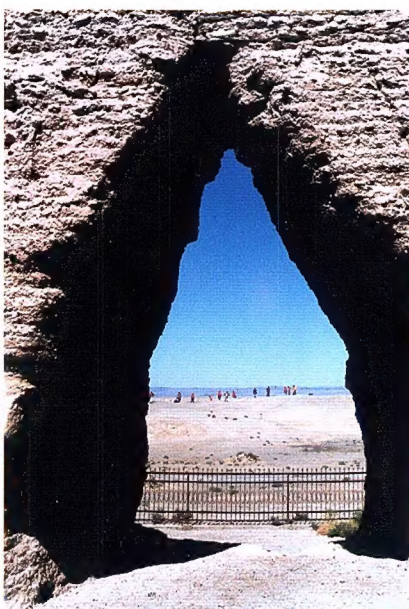
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*Photos & article by Zhong Jintang*

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## FROM THE EDITOR

The name "Lop Nur" reminds many people of two great travellers: the scientist, Peng Jiamu, and the explorer, Yu Chunshun, who lost their lives while traversing this "restricted life zone". The deaths of Peng and Yu have further enshrouded this place in mystery.

Despite the enigma of Lop Nur and its inherent dangers, this hideous desert has, from time to time, tempted courageous explorers from all over the world to challenge it. In the cover story, two teams of amateur explorers, one of which is composed entirely of women from South China, follow different routes into this mystical area. Separately, they pass the two spots where Peng was lost and Yu was found dead, casting their journeys in solemnity and gloom.

If you find the Lop Nur trips too thrilling, you can relax through a journey to Baiyangdian Lake in Hebei Province. Your eyes will moisten at the sight of the vast expanse of water. Boating and fishing on the lake, weaving reed-mats by the waterfront, the distinctive ritual of weddings and funerals... all reflect the unique flavour of this North China waterside village. So why not expose yourself to the pleasant lake breeze and refresh yourself?

Of course, you still have other alternatives, like visiting the villages of the minorities in southern Yunnan, or being a soldier of the Eighth-Route Army in Huangya Cave in the Taihang Mountains for a day. Autumn is the ideal season to visit these places.



# 山西省天利實業有限公司

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The company mainly deals in imports and exports of minerals, chemicals, textiles, garments, silk products, foodstuffs, local products, livestock products, machinery, electrical appliances, light industrial products, handicrafts and medicines and healthy products. It also contracts for projects abroad, labour exports and tourism projects abroad.

It is the member of chamber commerce of minerals, chemicals, textiles, pharmaceuticals and healthy products, food and livestock products, machinery and electrical appliances, light industrial goods and handicrafts. Tianli Enterprise Co. has established offices, branches and joint ventures not only in various parts of Shanxi Province, but also in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, the United States, Italy and Thailand.

The company is the backbone of the Tianli International Shareholding Group Co., which is Shanxi's leading enterprise in foreign trade and economic cooperation. When it is listed on the stock exchange in the year 2000, the shareholding group will join the ranks of large trans-national group worldwide.

Tianli Enterprise Co. will continue to have confidence in its staff member, and great attention to creativity, quality and reputation. It welcomes friends from all walks of life and from home and abroad to hold businesstalks and discuss development programs so as to create a brilliant future together.

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## Yangge Dance Craze

While young people go to karaoke bars, discos and nightclubs to pass their evenings, many urban senior Chinese citizens in Beijing like to gather at a nearby park or a neighbourhood ground to practise Yangge Dance, a traditional type of Chinese group dance. Waving colourful fans or ribbons, the dancers seem to become much younger as they change steps and form various formations to the shifting rhythms produced by the gongs and drums.

Half of these dancers are retirees over 60, and some may be well in their 70s or even over 80. They take part in the dancing for recreation as well as exercise. The steps and rhythms of this Chinese folk dance are easy to learn, and any onlookers can step into the group and join the dancers at any moment. Competitions are organised regularly among the neighbourhood dancing teams in Beijing.

## Tibet on the Internet

Travel lovers can visit more than 100 scenic spots in Tibet these days by browsing on the Internet. Tibet, veiled in mystery, has always been a dream destination for people from all over the world. According to the Tourism Administration of the Tibet Autonomous Region, some 367,000 tourists visited Tibet last year. To satisfy people's great interest in the natural wonders and ethnic customs in the area, the office has posted many locations on the Internet, such as the Potala Palace and Mt. Qomolangma.

## Tian'anmen Square: Facelift

The world's largest square, Tian'anmen Square just outside the Forbidden City in the heart of Beijing, is going through a facelift. The paved bricks on the ground and the loud-speaker system installed in 1959 are being replaced. More than 20,000 square metres of bricks have already been changed. Each cement brick in the 170,000-square-metre area will be replaced with wear-resistant granite bricks, which will have a life expectancy of at least 50 years.

Lighting has been a major problem for a long time. Four tall floodlights were put up for the celebration of Hong Kong's return to China last year, but the move was criticised by some for spoiling the square's appearance. It is suggested that these tall poles be removed and dim lights on the old poles replaced with brighter ones. Meanwhile, lights on the surrounding buildings, including the Tian'anmen Rostrum, the Great Hall of the People, the Monument to the People's Heroes and the two museums on the east edge, will also be replaced.

## Xi'an Aims to Be Best for Tourists

Xi'an, an ancient Chinese metropolis and capital of Northwest China's Shaanxi Province, has been working hard to make itself an international destination. In 1997 alone, the local government invested 136 million yuan (US\$16.4 million) in roads and tourism amenities. Forty-two of the city's streets have been renovated or expanded; a 13.7-kilometre section of the Ming-dynasty city wall has also been renovated and cultural relics on display increased. Other tourists spots listed in this renovation programme include the Qin Terracotta Warriors and Horses Museum, the Shaanxi Provincial Historical Museum, and the Bell Tower and Drum Tower.

## Giant Panda's Birthplace

After analysing a large collection of giant panda fossils, archaeologists have concluded that Southwest China's Guizhou Province may be one of the original birthplaces of the giant panda. Many ancient giant panda fossils from various evolutionary periods, dating from 10,000 to 600,000 years ago, have been unearthed in this province. Archaeologists believe that the fossils discovered in Guizhou cover three of the four periods of the modern panda's evolution. This endangered species is now only found in Southwest China's Sichuan, Northwest China's Gansu and Shaanxi.

## 8,000-Year-Old Relics

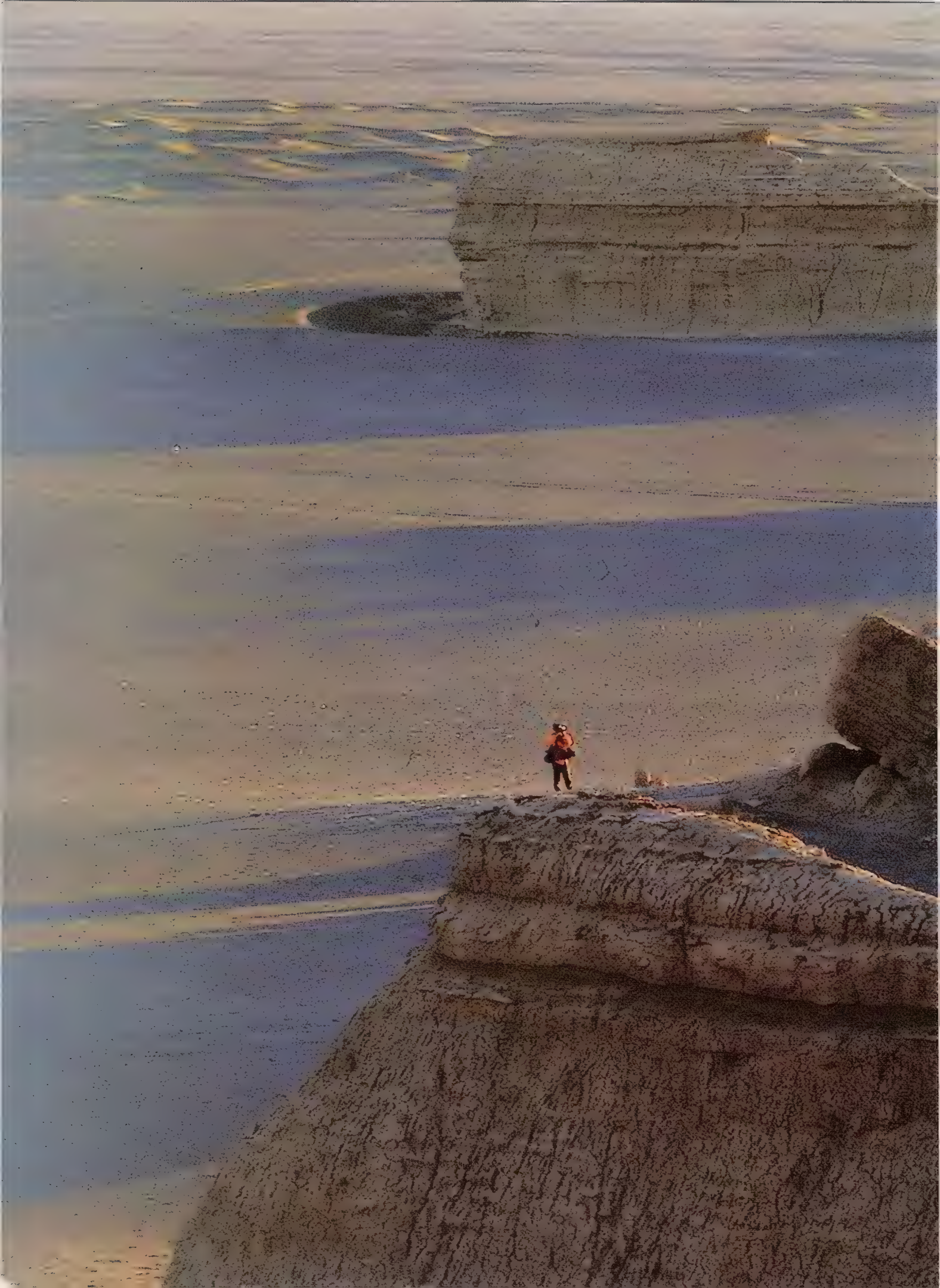
Chinese archaeologists recently unearthed extensive Xinglongwa Culture ruins dating back some 8,000 years in the eastern part of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region in North China. Among the new discoveries are numerous pieces of pottery, stone objects and the foundations of more than 200 houses characteristic of stone age society.

## Tourism to Be Tapped in Panjin

With its unique attractions, Panjin on the Liaodong Peninsular in Liaoning Province, Northeast China, has become a tourist spot. The Shuangtaihekou National Nature Reserve, 30 kilometres from the city centre, is an important breeding site for many species of birds. It is also a resting place for passing migratory birds, and home to 321 different types of wild animals. Among the 236 kinds of birds found here are the red-crowned cranes and Saunders's gulls.

On the Red Sea Beach is a vast area of seepweed plants which turn purple and cover the beach like a carpet in October. Near the city of Panjin, tourists can also find a forest of steles which, covering 20 hectares of land, is the second largest of its kind in China.







## Cover Story

# Traversing the Formidable, Deadly Lop Nur

Two groups of travellers successfully traversed the formidable Lop Nur, undergoing indescribable hardships. Here some of these brave explorers share their unusual experiences with us

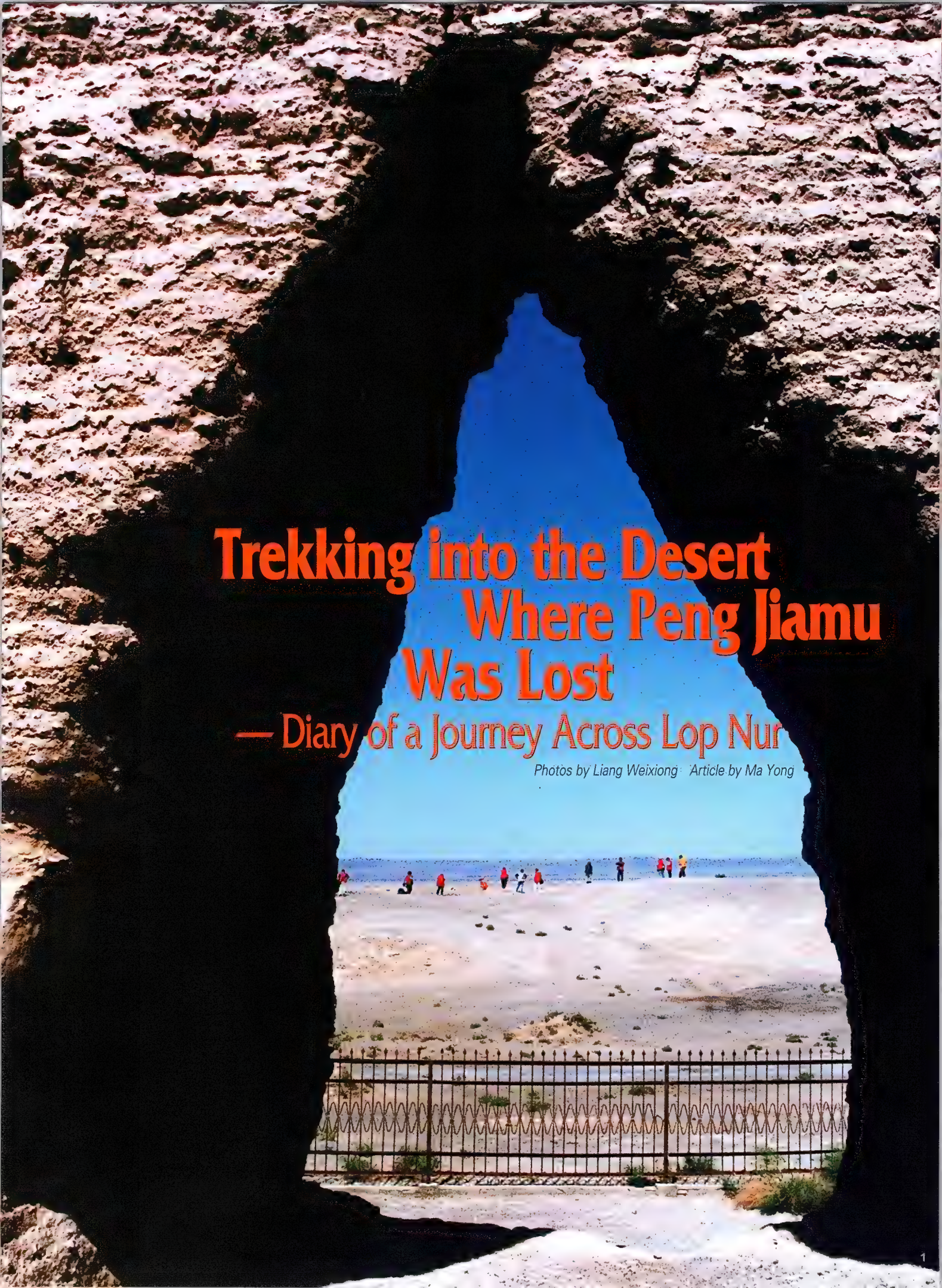
going westward beyond the Yumen Pass, there was no trace of life for dozens of kilometres — not a single blade of grass or a tiny ant, not to mention human beings.....

..... wind whistled continuously, churning up wave after wave of sand; in the worst conditions, one could not even see one's fingers with arms extended in front .....

..... standing in the centre of Lop Nur was like standing on the moon. The bare greyish brown earth surface was covered with a fine dust which would bury one's foot at every step. There was no echo even when you shouted at the top of your voice.....







# Trekking into the Desert Where Peng Jiamu Was Lost

— Diary of a Journey Across Lop Nur

Photos by Liang Weixiong · Article by Ma Yong





## September 22, 1997

### Going Westward Beyond the Great Wall

At 8:30, six large buses carrying 222 tourists and explorers from Guangdong set out from Dunhuang and headed westward beyond the ancient Yangguan Pass.

After passing the town built in the ancient Song-dynasty style, the Great Wall of the Han dynasty and the beacon towers, the area became increasingly bleaker. At noon, after the buses had streamed out of Yumen Pass, we were surrounded by nothing but desolation. At the foot of the gate structure of the Yumen Pass was a sign on which the words "Yumen Pass of the Han Dynasty" were written. There was nothing of the past to be seen in this fort-like gate tower. One could hardly imagine the days when this important passage on the Northwest frontier bustled with activities as batch after batch of diplomatic envoys and merchants travelled back and forth carrying with them silk and jade.

Out of Yumen, we could keep in touch with the outside world only by radio and telephone via a navigational satellite. As we drove away from Yumen, everybody turned to catch a last sight of the pass as if reluctant to leave. We soon entered the boundless Gobi.

As we proceeded at different speeds, the six buses fell out of sight of one another soon after we left Yumen. Our bus had strayed from the correct trail. As soon as our driver realised that he was heading in the wrong direction, he stopped to get his bearings. After driving for a little over 10 minutes we finally caught sight of the other buses. It was a minor alarm.

Later, when I asked the driver how he was able to find his bearings, he said, "Follow one's feelings." He then explained that he determined the direction by the shadows cast by the sun, the camel thorn in the desert and the shape of the sand dunes — the luxuriant side of the camel thorn always faces the east.

At 4:00 p.m., we arrived at campsite No. 1, from where



we were to proceed on foot. There were some half-erected tents. What remained of the work was to be completed by us, the first timers. It was not an easy job. We had to piece together the frames, pull the canvas, sink the iron pegs and tighten the ropes. It took more than half an hour to erect a tent. Many of us complained of pains in the back and joints, but this was later compensated for by a rich dinner that night.

## September 23 Seeing Lop Nur for the First Time

At 9:00 a.m., we headed for the depths of the Lop Desert. The desolateness of the great Gobi can hardly be imagined by anyone who has not been there. For dozens of kilometres, there is no sign of life. One cannot even see a solitary blade of green grass, let alone human beings.

We followed the track of the bus of the advance party and walked for 45 kilometres. Surprisingly, the women members of the team did much better than the men both in endurance and in bearing hardships. Few of them dropped off on the way while nearly 10 percent of the men could not complete the trek and had to climb onto the bus. People joked that the desert belongs to women.

It is utterly monotonous travelling in the Gobi desert. Sand and gravel stretch as far as the eye can see. The horizon is always in sight. As we trekked, we had to fight against overwhelming drowsiness.

The most trying time came when we were approaching our destination. There seemed to be an infinite distance to cover and no end to the sand dunes. We would think that the sand hill in the distance was the last, only to discover that there was another behind it.

At night, we went outside the tents to watch the stars, which stretch across the sky, shining, sparkling and winking. The mellow



Previous page:  
The magnificent  
"Yadan" land form  
near Lop Nur

1. Once out of the Yumen Pass, all you can see is the boundless desert.
2. Stepping into the Gobi, excited and refreshed!
3. Passing through the Gobi on camels
4. A reliable companion on the trip

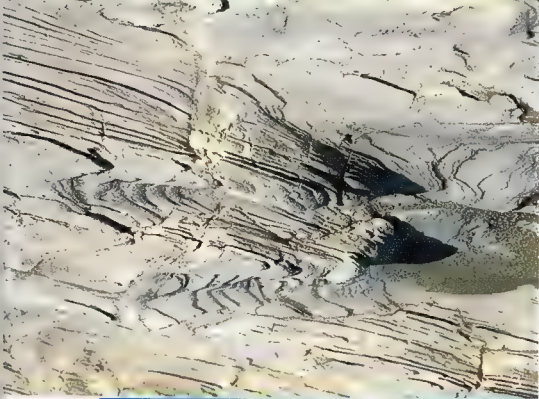




Driving in the boundless desert, one has to determine one's bearings from the direction of the sun's shadows and the shape of the sand dunes.







moonlight gives the barren desert a cosy and delicate touch. With the heat of the day evaporated, it is particularly pleasant standing in the cool breeze. As the death-like emptiness and desolation of the day has faded away, night really is beautiful in Lop Nur.

### September 24 Rolling Sand Dunes

We started for the centre of Lop Nur in the early morning and after walking for two hours reached the Kumtag Desert in the southeast. The desert was a hideous place, but had to be crossed before we could reach the heart of Lop Nur. Wind whistled in our ears, churning up wave after wave of sand. Even with our gauze masks, goggles, wind-breakers and a large towel covering our heads, sand still seeped into every crevice. We gauged the intensity of the wind and found that it was Force 7 on the Beaufort scale, blowing at a speed of 10 metres per second.

Zhou Xinwei, the team leader, informed us that the Kumtuk Desert we were crossing was known as the "River of Flowing Sand", along which the reverend Monk Xuanzhuang of the Tang Dynasty (618-907) had travelled when he journeyed to India for Buddhist scriptures.

The wind was in fact comparatively mild. The strongest gales usually blow between spring and summer. The sand raised by a strong wind can darken the sky and blot the sun or the moon out. In this desert, a Force-8 wind blows as often as 100 times a year. In the worst conditions, with one's arms extended in front, one cannot even see one's fingers.

### A Nuclear Base in the Desert

In the heart of the Lop Desert there is a nuclear base which covers an area of 100,000 square kilometres, as large as the whole Zhejiang Province in East China.

It is here that dozens of ground, underground and atmosphere nuclear tests were carried out. This vast area is now circled with barbed wire. Scattered outside the spiked fences are signs which warn: "Permanently polluted area!"

Tourists must be careful not to intrude into this deadly area.

As the so-called lesser wind raged around our tents, it was impossible to sleep in peace. There seemed to be dozens of hands pulling and tugging at the tent. To prevent the tent from being blown over by the wind, we had to get up in the middle of the night and hold the pegs down in the sand. When we awoke, we found that our mouths, noses, ears and hair were all filled with sand. As there was little water to wash, we could only try to remove the sand with handkerchiefs and fingers.

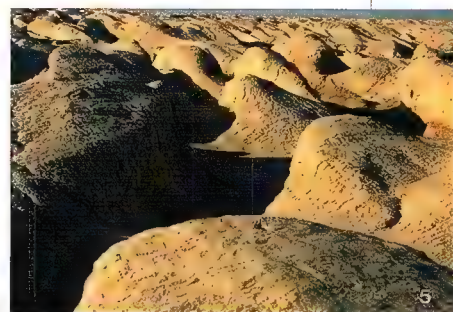
We have long been told that even the best delicacies in the world cannot be enjoyed in the Lop Desert. Now that we are actually here, we have realised just how true this is. In the twinkling of an eye, the food in front of you is covered with sand.

### September 25 The Weird 'Yadan' Land Form

Passing Sanlong Sand today, we found the desert landscape in the area very unusual. From a distance, the pale yellow dunes scattered here and there resembled a lion, tiger, town or tower and a great variety of other shapes. The guide told us that this was the famous "Yadan" land form, found mainly in the northern and eastern parts of Lop Nur, covering more than 3,000 square kilometres. It is second in size only to that found in the northwestern part of the Qaidam Basin.

Different angles alter one's perception of the "Yadan" land form. When viewed from a height, the dunes in the setting sun look like thousands of ships with their sails unfurled, then like countless whales ploughing through the waves and then like an array of ancient castles. The wonderful sights of nature made us heave sighs of admiration, bringing no small joy to our lonely journey in the desert and "killing off" many rolls of our film.

Though desolate, the "Yadan" land form really was enchanting.



1. Walking in the Gobi, a test of one's will
2. Only the trunks of dead trees are seen in this barren land.
3. A typical lacustrine land form
4. These plants play a vital role in stabilizing the sand.
5. Like waves in the sea, these earthen formations all face the same direction.



1. A makeshift tent
2. Setting a stone stele to mark the trip
3. Playing with the camel
4. No noodle soup could be so delicious!
5. The profile of this travel group is detailed on the stele.



### September 26 A Memorial Ceremony for Peng Jiamu

At 3:00 p.m. today, having trekked for more than five hours, we arrived at Shajingzi in Kumkuduk. An eye-catching stone tablet surrounded by a wooden fence stood on a sand dune in the distance. This is the grave marker for the famous scientist Peng Jiamu, who was lost here almost two decades ago.

The spot, 250 kilometres from Dunhuang, lies between Kumtag Desert and Aqitag Valley. There was no human habitation, greenery or water, only fierce winds, hideous sand, sparse camel thorn and the occasional passing wild camels.

Entrusted by Peng Jiamu's family, we held a memorial ceremony at his grave at 4:30 p.m. After performing three deep bows, we placed the paper flowers we had made during the course of our trek at the grave and offered him sacrifices of mineral water, beer, pears and steamed buns. We used water in place of wine in making a libation to him. The 222 team members stood in silent tribute for three minutes.

Peng Jiamu was a research fellow from the Shanghai Institute of Biochemistry of the Chinese Academy of Sciences and concurrently vice-president of the Xinjiang Academy of Sciences. In June 1980, he led his colleagues to this "Sea of Death" to conduct scientific research. It was the hottest season of the year. When they arrived at Kumkuduk on June 15, they were running out of fuel and water. At 11:00 a.m. on June 17, team members could not find Peng at the campsite. There was a note on his jeep, which read, "I'm going eastward to look for water." He never returned. Despite a carpet aerial and surface

search by many parties, no trace of him could be found.



### The Lop Nur Crazes

When the ruins of the ancient Loulan State were found by Swedish geologist and explorer, Sven Hedin, early this century, Lop Nur began to draw attention from people throughout the world. Many famous explorers from the United States, Britain and Japan journeyed here and took valuable Loulan relics home with them.

The second Lop Nur craze began in the late 1970s. When Chinese and Japanese film makers were working together on the TV series *The Silk Road*, the Xinjiang Academy of Sciences assigned its scientists to go with the TV team. Another exploration team went to the Lop Nur three times to do archaeological research on the Loulan State; a different group for comprehensive scientific researches spent 10 years at Lop Nur completing a general inspection of the area. One team member, Peng Jiamu, was lost in the summer of 1980.

The two tours organised by the China Travel Service, Guangdong Branch, in 1996 and 1997 should represent the third Lop Nur craze. Participants of these trips were neither scientists nor professional explorers, but tourists crazy about Lop Nur!



Some team members placed their personal things, such as scarves, hats, notebooks, pens or food they had saved in front of the stone tablet. The vehicles each blew their horns three times in salute to Peng Jiamu. Finally, we erected another stone marker at the spot in memory of this desert hero.





**On the desolate desert, we set up a stele to mark the event, inscribed on it the profile of our travel team composed of 222 courageous members.**





We saw several adobe houses, with neatly dressed occupants, though their clothes were old and far from fashionable. The guide told us that they were probably the Lop people, or Lop Jor people. We saw quite a few aged people who turned out to be more than 100 years old. They did not know their exact ages because the Lop people do not have a keen sense of time.







## September 27 A Mysterious Tribe in the Desert

Today, we came to a place whose name is unknown to us. All we know is that it is in the southwestern part of the Lop Desert, where there are endless sand dunes and withered tamarisk groves. "Look, there are families here," those walking ahead shouted. There were indeed a few houses. Surprisingly, the people there were not in the primitive condition we had expected. Both the children and adults were dressed neatly, though their clothes were old and far from fashionable.

The guide told us that they are probably the Lop people, or Lop Jor people ("Jor" means "lake" in Mongolian). They moved from place to place wherever there was water, living in crude sheds built from reed stalks and covered with mud. For generations, they had lived around Lop Nur, or Lop Lake. When the Lop Nur dried up, they began to move gradually westward, most of them eventually settling in Milan. Those we saw today are probably a few households who did not like to live with outsiders.

When the Lop people saw us, they were at first extremely surprised, but then warmly invited us into their houses. Once inside a house, it was our turn to be utterly surprised. Is this home? The room was empty except for a pile of earth with some dry reeds on it, which we guessed was probably the bed. There was no furniture. All we saw were five or six pieces of clothing hanging on a line. Behind the house was the cooking stove, which was actually a pit dug into the ground with faggot in it. We saw no bowls or plates. As we did not know each other's language, we could only gesticulate and try to guess at each other's meanings. Pointing at a flock of sheep in the distance, we asked if the sheep were theirs. It took them a long time to nod their heads after they had guessed



## The Profile of Lop Nur



Lop Nur is located in the heart of the Tarim Basin in the southeastern part of Northwest China's Xinjiang. It was part of the Indian Ocean some 50,000 years ago. As a result of the

rise of the crest, Lop Nur became one of the hundreds of salt lakes that appeared in Xinjiang. During the West Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 24), when Zhang Qian, the imperial envoy, reported his journey to the West Region to Emperor Wudi, he described the city walls of Loulan State as being built on the shores of a vast salt water. This "salt water" was Lop Nur, which was then famed "King of Salt Lakes" because of its size. Nevertheless, in the later years, the Loulan State was eventually dismembered, by nature and human wars, and the lake of Lop Nur shrank.

But the lake did exist until the late 1950s. As described by a Russian geologist: "When spring comes, birds fly above the lake, singing all day long; on the edge of the water, where wild animals come to drink, the footprints of camels and gazelles are found. In the luxuriant reed groves, tigers hunt wild pigs..."

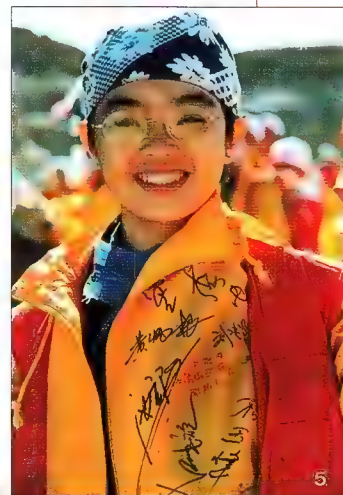
Unexpectedly, the water of Lop Nur disappeared completely in the 1960s, converting the area into a desolate desert.

what we meant.

The folks here are simple and honest. Lost properties are untouched and doors left unlocked. For many years, no one has lost anything, and quarrels or fights are almost unheard of. There are more than 10 households in the community of about 50 people. All of them are herdsman, feeding their animals on tamarisk leaves and living a self-sufficient life.

Poor communications have cut the local people off for a long time from the outside world. As they rarely leave the desert, they have retained their simple, age-old style of life. They do not smoke cigarettes, nor drink wine. Their staple food is mutton and a kind of wheat bread known as "Kumexi". Lack of medicine and medical services are usually a problem to people in out-of-the-way areas, but not to the Lop people here, who are sturdy in physique and rarely troubled by disease. The narrow strip of land where they live is a natural store-house of herbal medicines.

We saw quite a few aged people there. They looked like they were in their 70s or 80s, but actually turned out to be more than 100 years old. However, they did not know their exact ages because the Lop people do not have a keen sense of time.



1. The campsite for more than 200 tourists emerges in the desert like a small city.
2. Finding someone to whisper to... A pair of lovers who met during the trip got married soon after they returned home.
3. Recreation in the desert
4. Getting married at Lop Nur
5. Team members signed their names on each other's coats at the end of the trip.



A man is wearing a full-body white protective suit with a hood and large black goggles. He is standing in a desert environment under a clear blue sky. In the background, there is a large, bright orange structure, possibly a tent or a piece of equipment. The man is looking directly at the camera.

Lop Nur is one of the driest places in China. The highest local temperature reaches 50°C and the ground surface can get as high as 80°C. Moist tissues were the second most-sought-after thing next to water. However, as soon as you opened the bag, the moisture in the tissue evaporated in no time and it soon became a piece of hard paper.





## September 28 Water Means Life

People living by the Pearl River in South China do not know how precious water is. But in the desolate Lop Desert, every drop of water is as precious as gold. For here, water means life.

As we began to leave Lop Nur, water was becoming increasingly short supply. Starting today, restrictions have been imposed on the use of water. The water in the wagon is to be used only for drinking and cooking. There is to be no more face washing. Bowls and plates are to be cleaned with sand. Each of us has been issued with three bottles of mineral water a day.

Luckily, I am well prepared for it. I carried a three-litre military water-bottle with me when I departed from Guangzhou and filled it in Dunhuang. We were told that the average annual precipitation in Lop Nur is 10-60 millimetres and most of the area has no rainfall at all. As the volume of evaporation is more than 2,000 millimetres, Lop Nur is one of the driest areas in China.

It is really uncomfortable in the arid climate. The skin on my palms have begun to peel off. My face skin is taut and my lips have become chapped. How do I look? As there is no mirror, I do not care.

Moist tissues are the second most-sought-after thing here next to water. We use them to wash our hands and faces. However, as soon as you open the bag, the moisture in the tissue evaporates in no time and it soon becomes a piece of hard paper.

The pair of new mountaineering leather boots I am wearing became distorted only a few days after we entered the desert and are very uncomfortable on my feet. Other people's soles have parted from the top because the moisture in the leather has evaporated into the dry air. We drink an average of two bottles of mineral water every day, but we do not perspire or urinate because the water has evaporated inside our bodies.

The highest local temperature reaches 50 degrees

### The Vanishing of Lakes in China

Lop Nur, once the largest lake in Central Asia covering an area of 30 million square metres, has dried up.

Qinghai Lake, the largest salt-water lake in China has shrunk nearly 3,000 square metres, and its water level is continuously lowering. The famous Bird Island in the western part of the lake has already become a peninsular.

Poyang, the largest freshwater lake in China, halved over the past three decades, due to the huge amount of sludge brought in by rivers.

Lake Baiyangdian, the "Pearl of North China", once dried up 10 years ago. In Hubei Province, there were 1,060 lakes, big and small, in the 1950s. But by the 1980s, only 309 of them remained.

It is an urgent task for the Chinese to protect the ecological balance and the existence of these waters! The tragedy of Lop Nur should not be repeated.

Centigrade here and the ground surface can get as high as 80 degrees. Some people said that the sand in the Gobi Desert is hot enough to cook eggs and bake cakes. At noon, we took an egg from the kitchen vehicle and put the theory to the test. After half an hour, the egg was indeed cooked and tasted no different from one boiled in water.

None of us has bathed since entering Lop Nur, and we are to go two more nights without. It is extremely uncomfortable having not washed for so many days. We feel itchy all over, especially at the end of the day when we are covered with dust. Some people have begun to get red blisters on their skin. We do not dare to change our clothes too frequently because there is no water to wash them. Feeling like a salted egg, I fully realise how precious water is.

In the afternoon, we found to our surprise a large water pit in the arid desert. Five metres long, three metres wide and two metres deep, the pit is only a few kilometres from our campsite. The blue sky and white clouds are reflected in the transparent water rippling beautifully in the breeze. I drank a mouthful, which was fresh and cool but had a sulphuric taste. It seems a miracle that the water has not evaporated in this arid desert.

We had another surprise today. We saw a mirage, which we had long wished to see. As the sun was rising, we suddenly saw a sapphire lake surrounded by tall trees. I could not help crying out, "Oasis!" Our team

1. The costumes of the Lop people are designed to protect the body from strong ultraviolet rays.
2. Riding through the salt land
3. One of the trucks loaded with a water tank and other supplies





1. Having a nap on this vast bed
2. Longcheng "Yadan" landform at Lop Nur
3. The desert sunset is breath-taking.

leader Zhou Xinwei smiled and said, "It's only a mirage." He was right. In a few moments, both the lake and the trees disappeared. We saw only the sparkling and undulating sand dunes in the sunlight. "You're extremely lucky. In five years, I've led six groups across Lop Nur, but only seen a mirage once. This is the second time I've seen it, and the most beautiful one at that," he added.



### September 29 An Unusual Wedding in the Desert

This is the last night of our exploration in Lop Nur and also the most romantic. An unusual wedding ceremony is planned for four pairs of brides and grooms in the desert according to the folk customs of the ethnic minorities in Xinjiang.

At 4:00 p.m., we arrived at the last campsite and began to make preparations for the wedding ceremony. The brides and grooms were given preferential treatment — to wash their hair. After eight days in the desert, our hair was so full of dirt and dust that we could not even comb it. After a discussion, the group agreed that each member was to save a bottle of mineral water for the lucky couples.

The water turned brown and muddy as they rinsed their hair. The brides looked embarrassed but enjoyed it. One of them kept on saying, "It feels good!" to the envy of the spectators.

Many of us then began to help them to dress. The brides were dressed in Uyghur clothes and had their hair tied in innumerable braids. As they rode on horseback, the grooms, wearing Uyghur hats and holding the reins, led the horses in circles around the tents and received our blessing as we sang Northern Shaanxi folk songs together. The fatigue from the end of the long journey disappeared. We each had only one thought in mind: enjoy it.

At 8:30 p.m., the ceremony formally began, presided over by the leader of the team, who issued desert wedding certificates to the newlyweds. They made this vow before us: "In this boundless desert, the rolling sea of sand is our witness that we shall love each other and never part." This was

followed by "teasing the newlyweds in the bridal chamber". The so-called bridal chambers were actually double tents, where each pair of the newlyweds was made to eat a single apple suspended on a string and tell their love story. The fun lasted for more than an hour. Probably out of embarrassment, none of the newlyweds slept in the double tents that night, instead passing the night as usual in the large tents with the other members of the team.

The wedding banquet was a special dinner of more than 20 courses prepared from three sheep and 10 chickens. Each member was given a bottle of beer, with the feasting lasting until after 1:00 a.m. The Milan Song and Dance Ensemble made a special trip to the campsite from Milan to give a performance for the wedding. The ceremony was followed by a bonfire party, bringing the joyous occasion to its climax.

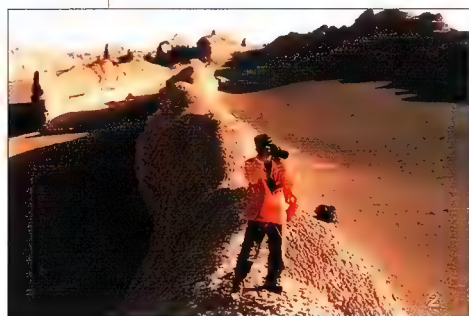
### September 30

At 1:00 p.m. today, we walked out of Lop Nur at last and arrived at the ancient town of Milan in Xinjiang.

It was an arduous journey. The distance from Dunhuang to Milan is 600 kilometres. In the eight days, the 222 tourists from Guangdong had trekked along the ancient Silk Road, walked across the Gobi, climbed sand dunes and traversed Lop Nur.

At 12:30 p.m., at the sight of the luxuriant poplars near the ancient town of Milan in the distance, we could not help crying out, "Green, green!" and hugging one another. The sight even brought tears into the eyes of some of the female members of the team. Victory in crossing Lop Nur was in sight.

Milan seemed to know that there were guests from afar arriving today, and the weather was unusually fine. As we marched slowly into the town, we were welcomed by the townspeople on both sides of the streets, as the sound of drums and gongs echoed over the town of Milan.







3

**On the last night of our exploration into Lop Nur, an unusual wedding ceremony was performed for four pairs of brides and grooms in the desert according to the folk customs of the ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. The brides and grooms were given preferential treatment by allowing them to wash their hair.**



# Following Yu Chunshun's Trail into Lop Nur

## — Notes on China's First Team of Female Lop Nur Explorers

Photos by Liang Weixiong Article by Lin Weisheng

On January 23, 1998, a few days before the Spring Festival, China's first team of female Lop Nur explorers — the Ellen Group of China Travel Service — departed from Guangzhou.

### Loulan Hotel, Where Yu Chunshun Stayed

The temperature in Guangzhou had been 16°C that afternoon. When we arrived at the Ürümqi airport after a flight of five hours, the temperature had dropped to -19°C. With all our warm clothes in the checked luggage, we soon had a taste of the bitter cold of the Northwest. Outside the arrival hall, everything was covered with white snow, with the exception of the runways. Some girls in the group exclaimed, "How beautiful!" But they soon changed their tone: "It's freezing cold."

Our journey was to start from Ürümqi, proceed southward to Korla and then follow the course of the Peacock River eastward to enter Lop Nur. Then, we would head north, climb over the Kuruktag Mountain, reach Turpan and then return to Ürümqi. The total distance was 1,800 kilometres.

At daybreak the following morning, having wrapped ourselves in several layers of warm clothes, we climbed onto the jeeps, four in each. We covered 500 kilometres on the first





day, climbing over the Tianshan Mountains on the way. The caravan of jeeps arrived at Korla, on the edge of the great desert, in the twilight. We spent the night at Loulan Hotel. It felt special and endearing to see the name of the hotel and a large map of the Lop Nur area hung on the walls of the lobby.

The guide told us that Yu Chunshun, the solitary explorer, had stayed at the hotel the night before he entered Lop Nur in June 1996, and was later found dead in the desert. The ceremony for crossing Lop Nur was held in front of the new building of the Loulan Hotel. Coincidentally, the route to be followed by the team into Lop Nur was identical to that of Yu Chunshun. We were both excited and nervous on hearing this. Yu Chunshun had also started from Korla and passed Old Camp, Poplar Gully, Laokai Screen, Advance Bridge, Longcheng and Tuyin, before reaching Lop Nur.

### A Poor Lunch in the Desert

On the second day, the caravan of jeeps started off and soon entered a different world. The desolate desert was almost next door to the modern city of Korla. The road we travelled was a makeshift highway built more than 30 years ago by the army for the testing of China's first atomic bomb. It was so bumpy that it was difficult to sit still in the jeep. Dust began to seep in through the cracks in the doors. The guide told us that we were to drive for more than 200 kilometres on the first day, so more difficulties and hardships were still ahead.

Wrapped in so many layers of warm clothes, it proved to be a challenge to relieve ourselves in the wilderness. Although we could do it behind the ample sand dunes, we still insisted on going as far away as possible from the caravan because the clerks from the Xinjiang Travel Service were all men. As a result, the drivers always frowned at us for it took us too long to relieve ourselves each time. Later on, we would only request a stop when it was absolutely necessary.



We had brought with us a lunch sack prepared by the restaurant in the Loulan Hotel, but with the weather being so cold, it was frozen solid. This, plus the dust in the jeeps and the bumpy road, made the lunch difficult to swallow. For a whole day, several team members ate only a few apples. By the time we reached the campsite, there were plenty of almost untouched food sacks in the jeeps. And this was only the start — there were more difficult days ahead.

### Poplar Gully: Charming and Imposing

On the way to campsite No. 1, we stopped at Old Camp with its beacon tower. Old Camp was a barracks built in the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220) for the frontier troops.

When we started off again, the caravan soon entered the Kuruktag Mountain. The jeeps bumped their way on masses of rocks with continuous chains of mountain peaks on both sides. After descending the mountain, we took a rest in Poplar Gully.

Poplar Gully is a strange yet picturesque place. With sheer cliffs on both sides, it resembles a formidable pass. As a result of erosion, the rocks on the mountain have turned to a great variety of colours and shapes. What is more unusual is that there is a clear spring in the gully providing clear and sweet drinking water — something not easy to come by on the edge of a vast desert. The spring water never freezes, even in sub-zero temperatures.

The Kuruktag Mountain acts like a screen sheltering the northern side of Lop Nur. Coming out of the gully, we saw the boundless Gobi stretching far to the horizon. The caravan then proceeded along the dried-up bed of the Peacock River to the centre of Lop Nur, arriving at campsite No. 1 at sunset.

The campsite was located in a depression among poplar groves. Under the guidance of the staff workers, we began to put up the tents. It was already dark by the time the last tent was erected, since none of us had never done this before. Supper was very simple — noodles cooked with canned pork. We all enjoyed it hugely — who would have thought tinned food could be so delicious?

It was the first time the team members had slept in the wilderness, with 12 men and women sleeping in the same tent. The only thing that bothered us was the lack of water. We had to perform the ritual of personal hygiene with moist



1. Early in the morning, the temperature dropped to  $-20^{\circ}\text{C}$  and one could see one's breath.
2. The first morning in Lop Nur
3. Spending the long, cold New Year's Eve in the desert
4. Enjoying the snow, certainly not found in their warm hometown!



tissues that we had carried with us.

### Rumpled Hair

Many of the team members slept poorly on the first night. It was like an ice box inside the tent because we had forgotten to put more coal into the heating stove. Even two sleeping bags, with one inside the other, were not enough. There was simply no place to keep one's feet warm.

Crawling out of our sleeping bags, we found that our hair had become as rumpled as a clump of tangled grass. Combs became useless, so we had to use our fingers. Not only did water freeze in the low temperature, but even the air seemed to have congealed. The air was heavy when inhaled and became light when exhaled. Wherever one went, one was surrounded by a puff of vapour. Breathing heavily, we loaded our things onto the jeeps, and without washing our faces or rinsing our mouths, each had a bowl of instant noodles. We washed on the jeep. But the moist tissues had frozen, so we had to make do it with dry tissue. However, wiping one's face was like grinding it because of all the dust.

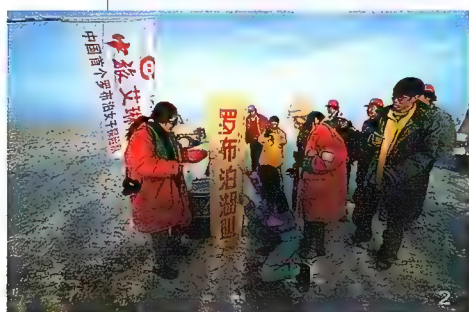
It was a fine day. As the first signs of the dawn appeared on the eastern horizon, the team flag was unfurled and the caravan of jeeps began to proceed into the depth of the wilderness.

### New Year's Eve Among 'Yadan' Formations

After leaving the campsite, we saw a large group of abandoned barracks. At Laokai Screen, the caravan stopped at an old anti-chemical washing station. The quotations from Mao Zedong's works written on the now dilapidated walls were still legible. Seeing the unusually shaped washing station and the pond for accumulating waste water, we could not help imagining how this mysterious place had looked decades ago — it was from here that mushroom clouds rose magnificently to the sky. It has now become an extremely desolate historical site.

The 12 jeeps sped forward in a single file, trailing behind a long tail of dust in the Gobi desert. Now the wind had dropped away completely, but the temperature rose steadily. There had been snow in the Kuruktag Mountain area but there was certainly none here in the basin. The air became drier, and the

lack of breeze made it even harder. As the jeeps jolted forward, dust seeped rhythmically inside. After erecting a tent,



the dust would take an age to settle. As we walked, the dust stirred up by our feet was waist high. Dust would fill half of the tent when anybody sneezed. Even more annoyingly, the dust turned your hair into a lump, which was very uncomfortable.

Campsite No. 2 was in an expanse of early "Yadan" land form, where we spent New Year's Eve and greeted the first morning of the new year.

It was an unusual experience to stay up on New Year's Eve around a bonfire in the desert, and also the longest night in our lives. As the temperature dropped to -20°C, we could not go to sleep in the open. Although we were psychologically prepared for it, it was still nearly unbearable waiting for the day to break in the bitter cold. Friends were later captivated by video footage of the team setting off fireworks to bring in the New Year, but when we saw the scene, we recalled the experience of the night in the desert and shivered just thinking about the cold.

### At Yu Chunshun's Grave

Campsite No. 3 was in a clearing among "Yadan" formations in Longcheng. This was the climax of the trip — seeing the spectacular "Yadan" land form, visiting the mysterious heart of the dried-up lake Lop Nur and holding a memorial ceremony for Yu Chunshun who was buried here. By this time we, the city girls, had become accustomed to life in the desert. The hygienic practice of washing one's hands before a meal and rinsing the mouth afterwards seemed a distant habit.

A simple memorial ceremony was held in front of the grave of Yu Chunshun. Out of admiration for the hero and legendary figure, we had discarded all superstition and traditions and visited the grave of a lone traveller unknown to us on the second day of the Chinese New Year. If the lonely dead in the grave were sentient, he would rest in peace.

Specialists warn people not to enter Lop Nur blindly without full preparations. Before a team sets off, it should at least follow these conditions: 1. Avoid seasons when the wind is strong. 2. Take several experienced guides or assistants who are familiar with Lop Nur. 3. Make sure it is provided with a plentiful supply of gasoline, water and food, motor vehicles,



a radio station, satellite navigational aids and a dynamo.

The travel agency warned that it is impossible for any individual to cross Lop Nur alone — not even Yu Chunshun could achieve it. Even supposing Yu had not lost his way, he still had to follow the route surveyed and plotted out by the guides beforehand and had food and water buried along the returning way.

The possibility of losing one's way, sandstorms, desolation and thirst are the terrors of Lop Nur.

### Like the Surface of the Moon

The centre of Lop Nur, a heart-stirring location, is at 90°18'30"E and 40°25'30"N, about 10 kilometres from the place where Yu Chunshun met his death. As soon as the jeeps parked, we all jumped down and ran immediately to the spot. Now we had enough reason to be proud of ourselves. Even Yu Chunshun, the famous contemporary explorer had failed to come this far; and to the teams' knowledge, nobody from Guangdong, still less women, had been there before!

It was like the surface of the moon, with the smooth bottom of the dried-up lake covered with a crust of salt. No grass grew here, and there was nothing around except the lifeless greyish-brown earthen surface. Walking on the thin crust of salt, one's feet was buried in a fine powdery dust at every step. One could walk so buoyantly that it was like walking into the nether world, a world of deadly and boundless silence found only in dreams. It was a place of total despair leading nowhere.

The China Travel Service, Xinjiang Branch, had brought a wooden tablet two metres high and 40 centimetres wide. A hole was dug at the centre of the desert and the tablet erected. There was already an empty gasoline barrel half buried there to mark the centre of Lop Nur. It was pinpointed by a senior engineer based on an up-to-date map. Unable to suppress the excitement, we all rushed over and signed our names on the wooden tablet and had several photographs taken next to it. One of the girls, Li Miaoling from Guangzhou, said, "I feel as excited as the

astronaut who landed on the moon."

On the eighth day, we visited a former jetty at Lop Nur and the site of a courier station of the Han dynasty. Then began the two-day withdrawal. It took us one and a half days to cross the Kuruktag Mountain and reach a small and rather primitive Uygur village, where the caravan of jeeps stopped for a rest. The excited team members were invited into the Uygur homes and were treated with fried fritters for the Uygur Fast-breaking Festival. We all drank to our fill the weak tea with a mutton taste. Then we played and took photographs with the Uygur children. Before leaving, we each took a handful of raisins with us. The hospitable Uygur villagers grinned with narrowed eyes and watched with both joy and curiosity — they must have thought us as a group of crazy "extraterrestrial" women coming out of no-man's land!



### Peng Gexia Commemorating Yu Chunshun

Peng Gexia, our guide with the China Travel Service, Xinjiang Branch, used to be a good friend of Yu Chunshun. In June 1996, Peng accompanied Yu along the Peacock River from Kolar to Lop Nur. Together, they inspected and designed Yu's walking route and buried food and water for Yu's journey. Unfortunately, Yu lost his way and died of thirst and hunger in Lop Nur.

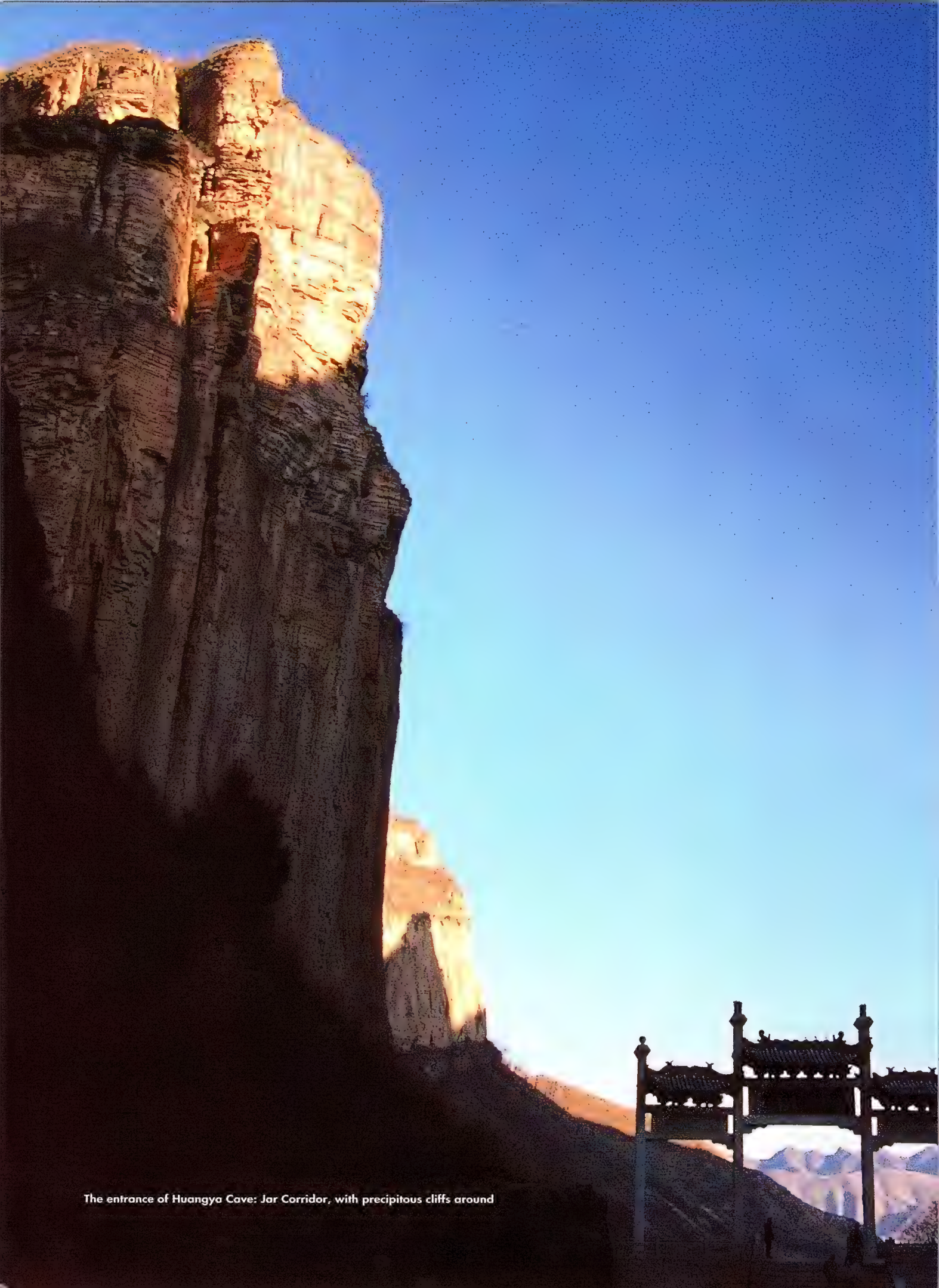
Peng told us that at Tuyin, the Han-dynasty courier station, he and Yu Chunshun drank beer together and said good-bye. He turned his back only after he saw Yu's figure vanish in the horizon. After the tragedy, Peng was the first person to arrive at the spot and buried Yu with his own hands. Peng remembered that before they parted, Yu had told him with a heavy heart, "If I can't succeed in walking through Lop Nur, it means my mandate is over." On another occasion, when the two of them were visiting the Longcheng "Yadan" land form, Yu exclaimed: "I've been to many places in Xinjiang, but no where else is as poetic as Longcheng!"

A wooden post was erected at the point where Yu Chunshun died. On the ground beside it, there seemed to be an image of a man's figure. Peng told us that the fluid from Yu's rotten body had turned the earth below dark. A Shanghai business man later made a generous donation to build a stone tomb for Yu Chunshun, with a bronze robust and a pair of bronze shoes.



1. On the edge of the abandoned nuclear base
2. The centre of Lop Nur is also the lowest point in the Tarim Basin.
3. Mourning Yu Chunshun at the site where he had died
4. The tomb of Yu Chunshun





The entrance of Huangyao Cave: Jar Corridor, with precipitous cliffs around



*Photos & article by Chan Yat Nin*

BE AN



# EIGHTH ROUTE ARMY SOLDIER AT HUANGYA PASS

Huangya Pass is famous not only  
for its picturesque scenes but also for a battle  
waged here during the War of Resistance Against Japan.

The Japanese army were repelled by the  
Eighth Route Army in the  
Huangya Cave Bloody Battle.





We set out from Licheng, a city in Shanxi Province, heading towards Huangya Cave, deep in the Taihang Mountains.

After entering the mountains in southeastern Shanxi, the word of Huangya Cave was heard time and again. This was not only because of its unique scenery, but also because the Eighth Route Army were based there during the War of Resistance Against Japan. The "Huangya Cave Bloody Battle" has made it one of the famous historical battlefields.

### American Students Come Every Year

A red cloth poster suddenly came into sight: "Come to Huangya Cave and Be an Eighth Route Army Soldier for a Day!" A building, the Gulong Mountain

### *The Song of the Eighth Route Army.*

They turned out to be the attendants of the mountain villa.

Arriving there at the same time as us was a group of American students. Organised trips bring them to the Taihang Mountains every year in the summer vacation, and a visit to Huangya Cave is always on the itinerary. The program was started by William Hinton, an elderly American.

Fifty years ago, Mr. Hinton came to the Taihang Mountains to help the local farmers with agricultural experiments. He has been organising trips to Huangya Cave since the 1980s.

We had the chance to go with this American group, and together we ate the farmer's food of the Taihang Mountains,

upward, it felt like the cliffs on both sides were pressing down on us, with only a narrow strip of sky overhead. There is an old Chinese saying: "If one man guards the pass, ten thousand cannot get through." We were told that one soldier once repelled 10 Japanese attacks, killing over 100 enemies.

Out of the corridor, the view suddenly broadened. We passed a basin in the mountain, climbed up along a path and



**THE WOMEN ATTENDANTS IN THE MOUNTAIN VILLA ALL DRESSED EXACTLY AS THE EIGHTH ROUTE ARMY SOLDIERS EXCEPT WITHOUT THE INSIGNIA ON THE CAP.**

Villa, stood in the valley. This was actually the reception centre for the Huangya Cave, but it looked more like a military headquarters. A group of women soldiers marched by in military uniforms, singing loudly. I listened carefully and realised that they were actually singing

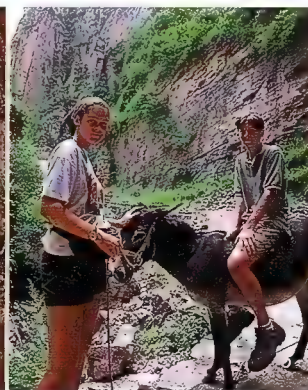
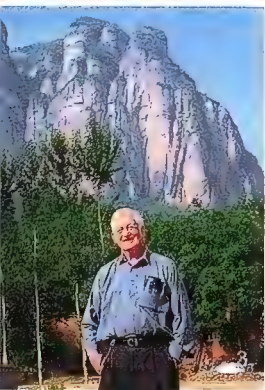
lived in "army camps" and made an expedition to Huangya Cave.

### The Eighth Route Army Defeated the Japanese Troops

The "Jar Corridor" is a natural mountain corridor, which extends for half a kilometre with a width of three-five metres. Looking

saw mountain peaks, one after another. On the way, we saw several pillboxes. In addition to these, there was a Zhenwo Pagoda (meaning "repressing the Japanese enemy") built on the ruins of one of the pillboxes, a martyrs monument, and the site of an ammunition factory during the wartime... evidence that an earth-shaking battle was once waged here.

On November 11, 1941, 5,000 Japanese soldiers attacked Huangya Cave in an attempt to destroy the Eighth Route Army's ammunition factory. The special regiment of about 1,000 Chinese soldiers fought for eight days and nights against the enemy.





They killed about 1,000 Japanese invaders and successfully won the battle with a 6:1 causality rate between the enemy and themselves.

We walked along a narrow stone path on the cliffs until we were about halfway up the mountain and then, climbing up a precipitous iron ladder, we entered the cave. We raised our heads, and to our surprise, we

saw a cave 25 metres high, 18 metres wide and 72 metres deep. It was indeed an ideal place for the biggest arsenal in the enemy's rear area in North China at that time.

We stayed overnight at the south entrance of the valley of Huangya Cave. Under a starry sky, the dark shadows of peaks on three sides looked very furtive. According to local

people, the sound of the battle in the valley can still be heard on a quiet night. Of course, we did not hear anything like that. However, at midnight, the wind began to blow stronger, creating a thunder-like sound. I knew the noise was probably formed by the wind stroking the cliffs, but it still sent a cold shiver down my spine.



1. Huangya Cave appeals to American students.  
(by Shan Xiaogang)
2. The rooms in the hotel are in the style of a military camp.
3. Mr. Hinton, an old friend of the Eighth Route Army  
(by Shan Xiaogang)
4. Writing a few pages of a diary
5. Riding a donkey  
(by Shan Xiaogang)
6. If one man guards this pass, 10,000 cannot get through.
7. The "Eighth Route Army soldiers" patrolling the mountain

Translated by M.Q.



### Tourist Tips

**Transport:** Train or bus from Taiyuan to Licheng. Special mini buses go to Huangya Cave (about 30 kilometres).

As an Eighth Route Army soldier you can wear military uniform, take part in military training, practise shooting, act as sentry, observe terrain, eat meals in the wilderness, and learn old army songs.

#### Fees:

1. The military uniform: 8 yuan per day per person. Taking photos in military uniform: 3 yuan per photo. (No charge if using your own camera.)
2. Tourist guide of the Eighth Route Army: 1 yuan per person for a group under 20 people, and 10-30 yuan for a group of over 20.
3. Military training: 1 yuan per person. Shooting practice: 2 yuan per bullet.
4. Accommodation: 40 yuan per bed in standard rooms, and 20 yuan per bed in ordinary rooms. The food is mainly game and wild vegetables.



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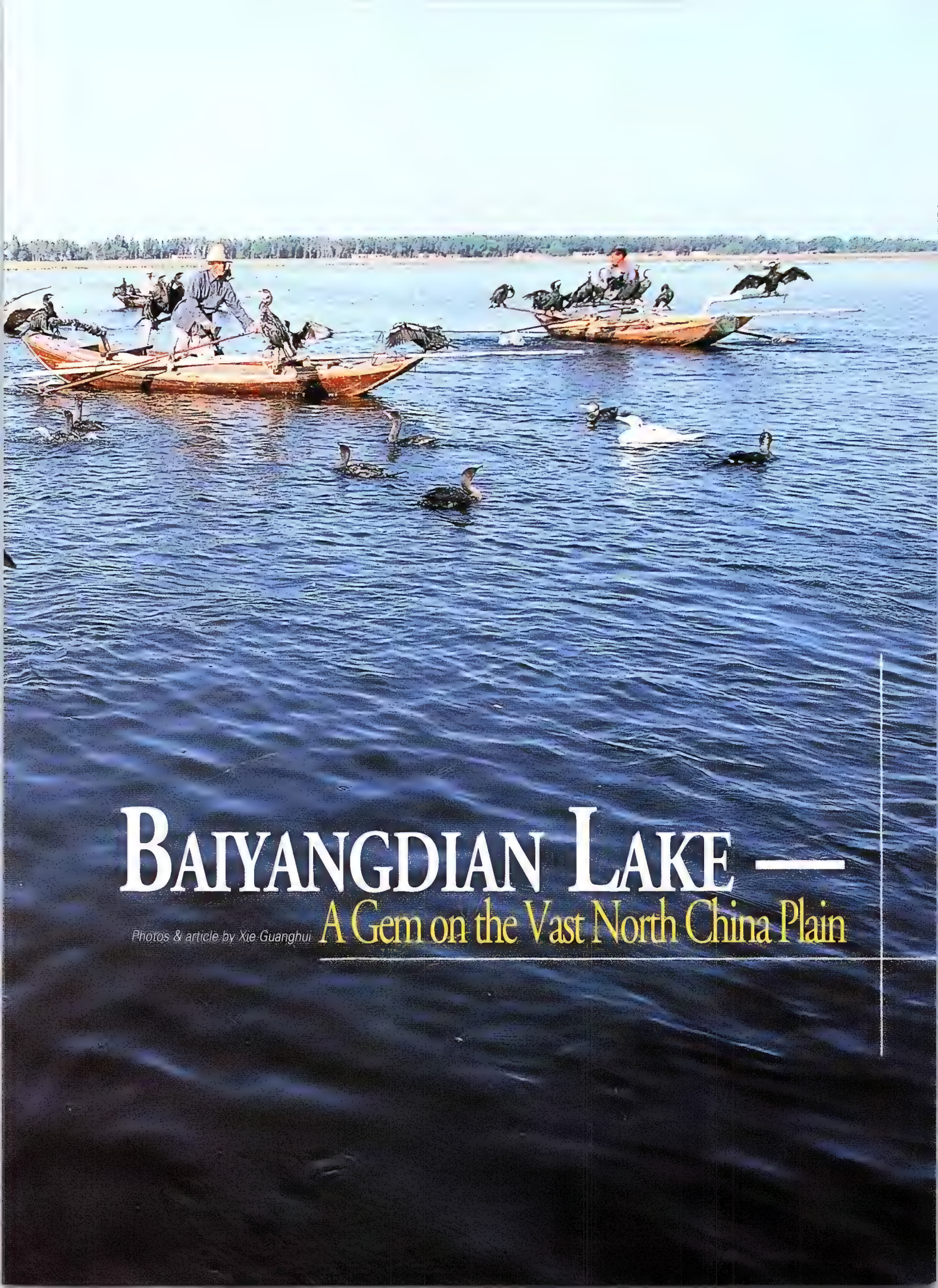
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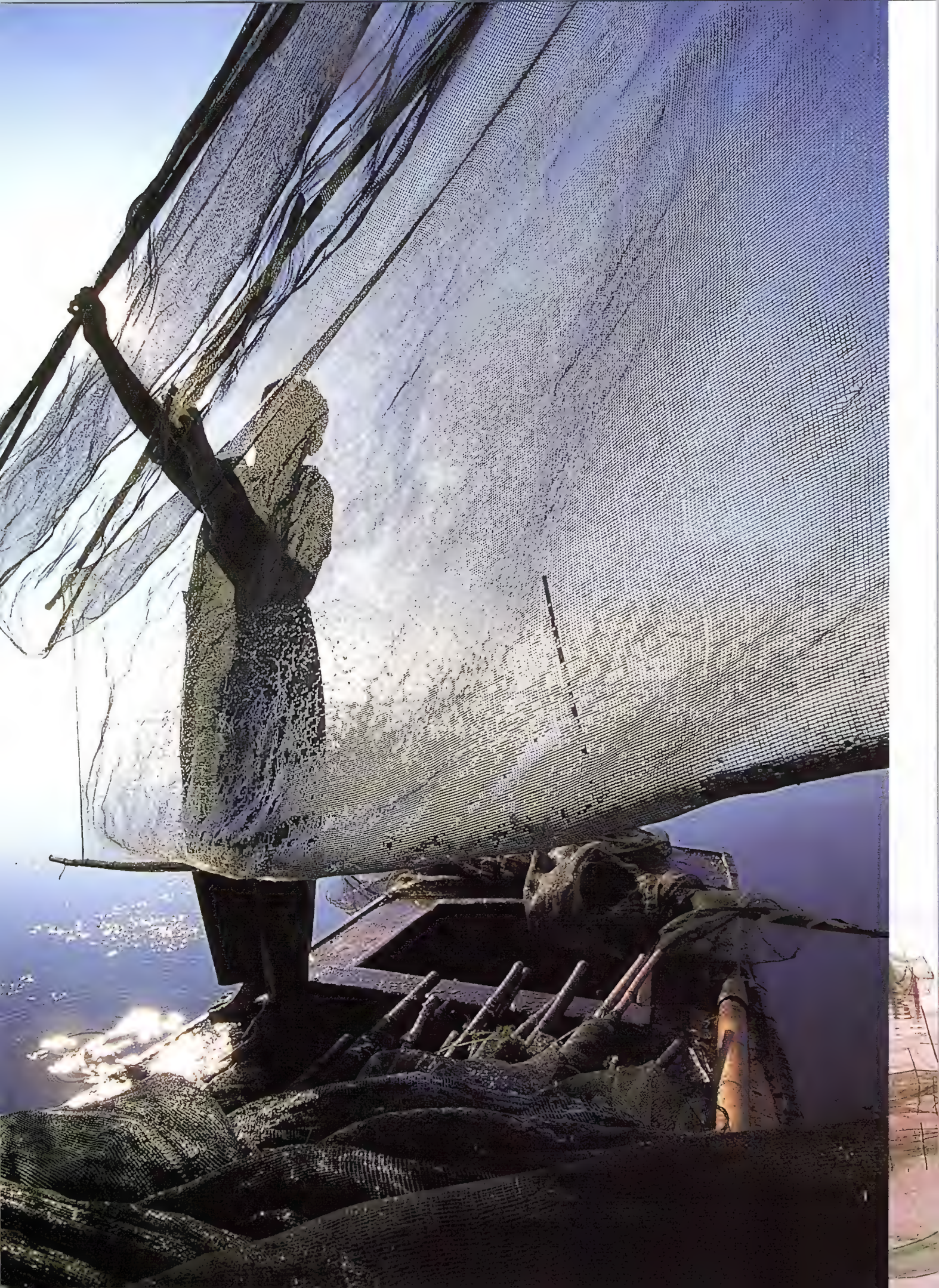


# BAIYANGDIAN LAKE —

## A Gem on the Vast North China Plain

Photos & article by Xie Guanghui







*Boats on Baiyangdian Lake are rowed with double oars, each about three metres long. Boatmen move the oars by crossing the handles in front of their chests while their body rocks back and forth. With the squeaking sound of the oars, the boats sail forward at an easy and peaceful pace.*



It was noon when I arrived at the Dongguan Wharf in Anxin County. Seeing that the passenger ship to Quantou Village, Baiyangdian Lake, had lifted its anchor, I waved my arm violently and shouted at the top of my voice: "Please wait!" But all my efforts were in vain, and the ship stubbornly pulled off the shore.

One step late and I had to wait for another day! I cursed my luck. Just then a man came over, humming a pop song. He untied a boat, pushed it with a punt-pole and darted onto the now drifting boat. He planted himself steadily and turned to me: "Missed your boat? Come on. Get on my boat!" Overwhelmed with joy and excitement, I doubled my steps down the staircase.

### **A Flavour of Southern China**

The boat, as light, narrow and small as a willow tree leaf, felt like a piece of slippery watermelon skin as I stepped onto it. Panicking, I stretched out all four limbs to steady myself. "Don't be afraid, squat down," the man said to me with a smile. Once I was securely seated, he pushed his double oars back and forth and we surged into the vast waters of Baiyangdian Lake.

**Previous page:** Before they set out on a fishing trip, the boats are lined up. The cormorants on the boats are in high spirits, ready for action.

1. Baiyangdian Lake has the reputation of being the "land of water and fish in northern China".
2. The four-cornered waternuts from Baiyangdian Lake are crispy and refreshing.
3. A scene reminiscent of the water land in southern China







1. Villagers at Quantou use reed strips to make baskets for catching shrimps.
2. The loud-speaker system in Quantou Village, which used to be a means of communication for mass meetings, is now used to look for people.
3. Jumping into the water for a good swim
4. Fishing is the main source of income for people at Baiyangdian Lake. Many families specialise in weaving fishing nets.
5. Reed weaving has become the single most important side-line occupation for local women. An experienced weaver can finish two to three mats a day.



*Each boat carries cormorants to help the fishermen. As the boats line up before they set out, the cormorants come to a rest on wooden sticks fastened to the boats, ready for action. Together, the birds and boats create an impressive sight.*



On Baiyangdian Lake, boats are powered by double oars, each about three metres long. Boatmen push the oars by crossing the handles in front of their chest while their body rocks back and forth. They do not have to exert too much energy and the boats sail forward peacefully with the oars moving up and down, like a bird flapping its wings. As the oars squeak, the boats sail forward at an easy and peaceful pace. In black paint, three characters on the boat's deck announced: Zhou Xiaorong.

"You're Zhou Xiaorong?" I asked.

He nodded, still smiling.

"What have you come for?" It was his turn to ask.

"Sightseeing," I replied.

"Too bad you've missed the lotus blossoming season. It was more beautiful than in any park."

Covering more than 360 square kilometres and bordering five cities and the counties of Anxin, Gaoyang, Renqiu, Xiongxian and Rongcheng, Baiyangdian is the largest landlocked lake on the Central Hebei Plain. My destination, Quantou Village, is located on the largest of the 97 islands scattered on the lake. "It's still far away! Why don't you go inside the cabin to take a rest?" As he said this, he squatted down, brought up a handful of fresh four-cornered waternuts from the water and threw them into the cabin. I peeled a waternut and my mouth was filled with refreshing juice. It was like living in the world of canals, rivers and lakes in southern China.



Before I knew it, the boat sailed into channels opened up among reed plants, poking two to three metres above the water's surface. The waterways, twisting and turning, looked so alike that I had no way to distinguish them. I felt I was in a labyrinth, but Zhou Xiaorong knew where he was going. When we met a boat sailing in opposite direction, he would bring up his oars and nod to the other boatman in greeting. "At night, as soon as you hear oars beating the water, you will have to shout at the top of your voice to avoid colliding into each other," he explained.

We sailed out of the reeds, and soon passed Majiazhai Village, where I saw fishermen trying to put out their cone-shaped fishing nets on wooden frames so that they could pick up the fish they had just hauled in. Nearby, several men were working on a boat. Beside, a few newly completed boats lay upturned. Freshly varnished with tung oil, they sparkled in the sun.

After sailing for more than 20 kilometres on the water, I saw a village in the direction the sun was setting. Gradually green tree tops and house roofs came into view. "Quantou Village?" I asked hurriedly. Zhou Xiaorong nodded his head and his eyes narrowed into a line as he smiled.

The boat pulled into a dock. Several women were washing clothes by the staircases, their conversations drowned by the beating of the wooden clubs against the clothes. A group of boys deftly stripped off their shorts and jumped into the water — with none of the restraint of a city dweller.









*Fishermen beat the water with their oars to send fish into a panic while urging the birds to do battle in loud voices. The cormorants turn dark in the face, and their eyes, like green jade, reveal their fierce character. Suddenly they dive into the water...*



### Cormorants Can Walk!

After Zhou Xiaorong had moored the boat, I asked him: "How much do I owe you?" He waved his hand to decline any payment and said: "If you don't mind, you're welcome to stay in my house." When I declined but thanked him for his invitation, he saw me off at the entrance of a lane, pointing inside: "Go straight and after the cross-roads you will find the hostel run by the Supply and Sales Cooperative." I bade him farewell and went into the lane. In this village of less than two square kilometres, there were neither wide streets nor crowds of people. In fact, there was not even a single bicycle. Coming from a big city, I felt an unusual sense of peace and tranquillity.

A flock of cormorants came out of a lane that crossed my path. Well fed, they held their breasts high, just like penguins. It was the first time I had ever seen cormorants walking. A man walked behind the birds, trousers rolled up and in bare feet. Sensing my surprise, he smiled and held up his fish basket to me, saying: "Look, they've caught some mandarin fish. Want some?" I said: "I'm more interested in watching how cormorants catch fish." He immediately replied: "That'll be easy. Come to Mawan at 7:00 tomorrow morning."

The sun had just risen above the water as I found myself walking toward Mawan along a muddy path. Beneath willow branches swaying gently in the wind there was a group of cormorants. Chang Dai, the old

man I had met the previous night, finished securing four wooden sticks on both the front and back of his boat and greeted me. In less than five minutes, one by one, he brought some 20 cormorants onto the boat with the help of a bamboo pole and rested them on the wooden sticks.

"The 18 cormorant raisers at Quantou Village are mostly old men," Chang told me. "Baiyangdian Lake is huge and it is harder to catch fish when there are just a few cormorants, so we always sail together. Besides, the more the merrier." Gradually more boats gathered. As everybody got ready to set out, the boats lined up in a neat formation with the cormorants on the wooden sticks looking in high spirits, ready for action. It was an impressive sight.

"In autumn, when the water becomes cold, fish dive to the bottom of the lake to stay warm among the grass," Chang told me. "So we use cormorants." Male cormorants, I was told, do a better job of catching fish than the females. Among Chang's 20 birds only four were female, which he kept for raising young birds.

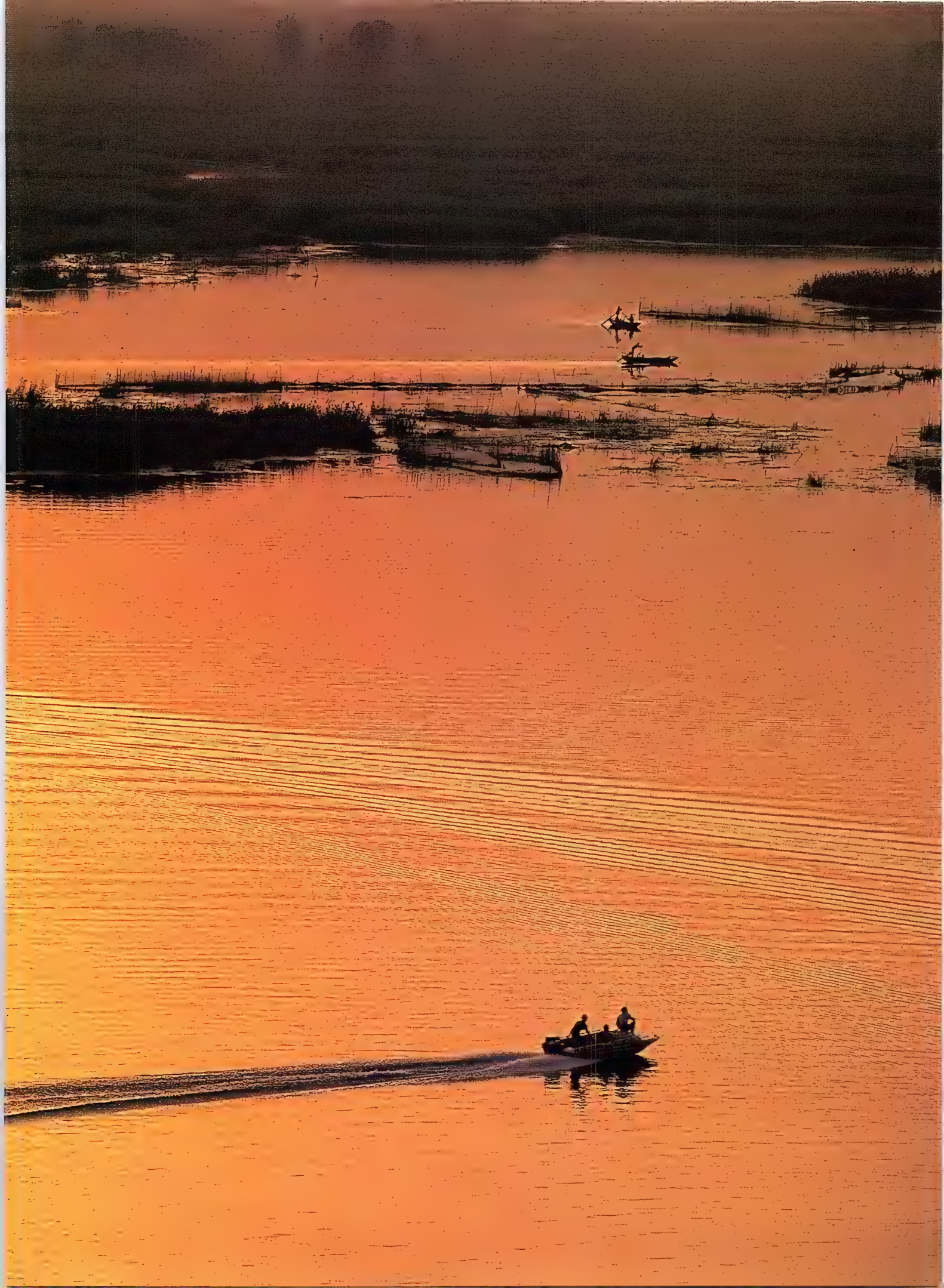
1. Morning at Baiyangdian is calm and tranquil.
2. It has to be a collective effort when the cormorants are fishing.
3. The cormorants are given rewards when they bring in their catch — to encourage them to get more fish.
4. It has been over 100 years since people at Baiyangdian Lake started to raise and employ cormorants for fishing.















Previous page: Covering 360 square kilometres and bordering five cities and the counties of Anxin, Gaoyang, Renqiu, Xiongqian and Rongcheng, Baiyangdian is the largest landlocked lake in the Central Hebei Plain.

1. Many fishermen working on Baiyangdian Lake order fishing boats from Majiazhai.
2. These two brothers have their own way of catching fish and shrimp.
3. Net-pen fish culture, a technique from southern China, has been introduced to Baiyangdian.
4. The sun is setting, time for the fishermen to cook supper.

### Worth More Than an Ox

Before Chang Dai released the cormorants into the water, he took out a handful of rice straws. Seeing this, the birds all stuck out their necks and flapped their wings. He removed a straw from the bundle with his teeth and tied it around the bird's neck. "If I don't do this, they will swallow the fish," Chang explained. "Once they are full, they refuse to work any more." Strangely, none of the birds resisted being tied up.

The 18 boats lined up into two rows and the fishermen waved their punt-poles. The cormorants all jumped into the water, flapping their wings, swimming, playing and diving. The people then beat their oars on the water to panic the fish, at the same time shouting at the top of their voice to urge the birds to work. The birds turned dark in the face, and their eyes, two pieces of green jade, revealed their fierce character. Only now did they dive deep into the water, keeping their wings tight to the body.

Cormorants have heavier bones and smaller gas cells than ordinary birds; they can also press the air out of their feathers quickly and soak them thoroughly. These features enable the cormorant to dive deep into the water to catch fish. That is why the fishermen care about their birds so much, as Chang said, "A good cormorant is worth more than an ox."

### Rewarding the Cormorants

Suddenly someone from a nearby boat pointed at the water and shouted: "Chang Dai, it's your bird!" It turned out that one of the birds was trying to swallow the fish it had caught, but was unable to because

of the straw tied around its neck. Chang Dai leaned over the railing of the boat and motioned to the bird as if he was trying to throw something at it. As he did so, he told me: "I'm pretending to feed it." Indeed, the bird swam over and the old man picked it up. He opened its beak and skilfully removed a carp which he placed in a fishing basket. He then untied the straw and fed the bird a small fish. Content, the cormorant turned and dived back into the water. "Reward it and it will bring the fish back next time." Chang explained.

One by one, the cormorants came back with their catch and received their rewards. I looked about and found it was busy on all the boats. The birds seemed in high spirits while the fishermen worked calmly. By the afternoon, most of the boats were loaded with fish both in the cabin and on the deck. The fishermen exchanged a few words in their local dialect to the effect that it was time to go back home. The birds were pulled onto the boat where they flapped their wings to shake off the water, shouting and singing excitedly. Then they turned towards the sun and spread their wings to dry the feathers.

People began to raise cormorants at Baiyangdian Lake about 100 years ago. They were said to have learned from people in southern





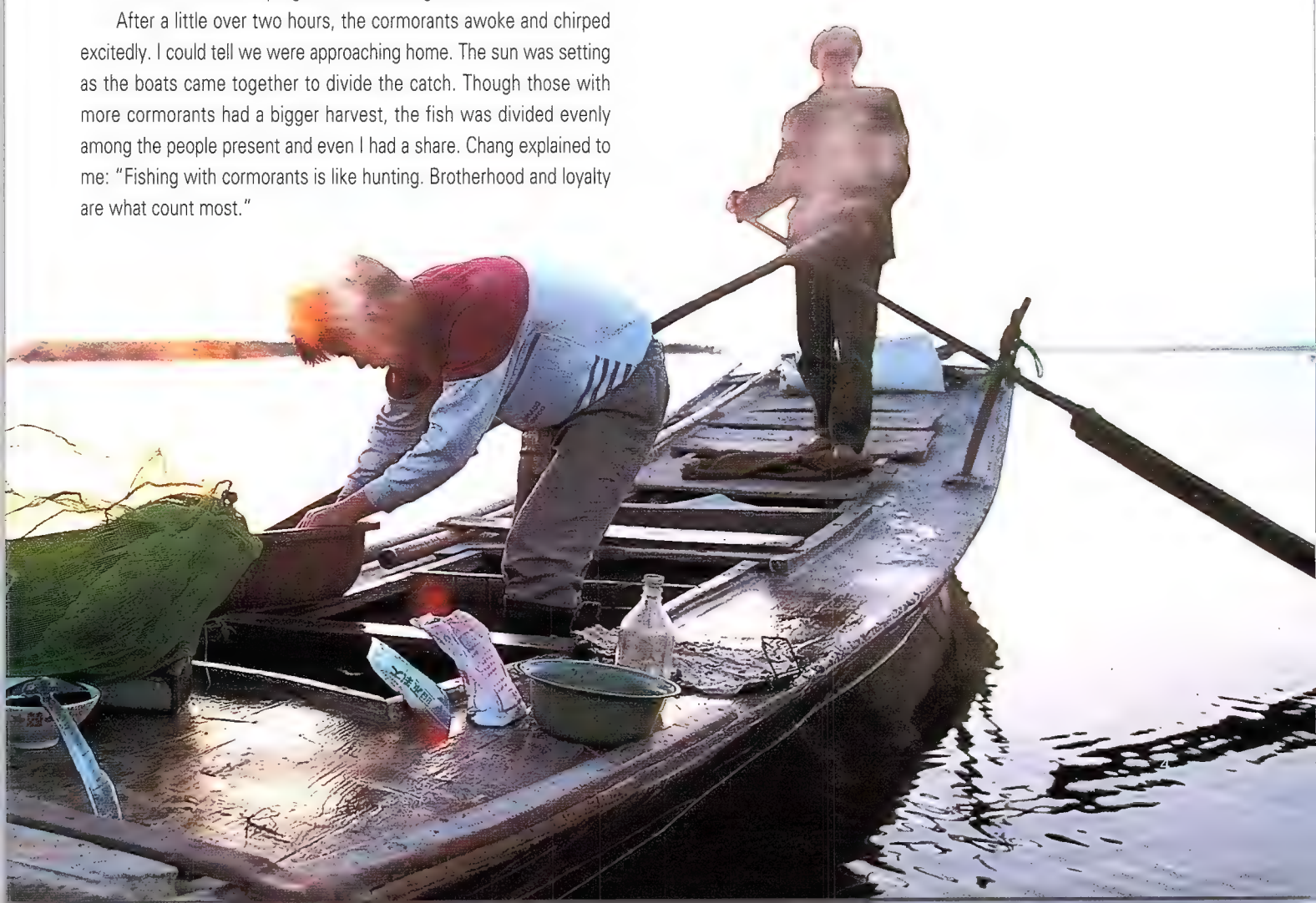
*For the local people, reed is another source of income apart from fishing. The workmen reach their sickles underneath the water to cut the reed at their roots and then bring the plants up. It is a tough job indeed and always done by men. But when it comes to weaving after the reed is dry and crushed into strips, it is the women's turn to show their skills.*



China. The life span of a cormorant is about 10 years, similar to most dogs. Unlike lakes in the south, Baiyangdian Lake is frozen during the winter, making raising cormorants very costly as they have to be fed during the long, cold, unproductive season.

Looking at the cormorants asleep on the swaying boat, Chang recalled an experience he had gone through. It happened in 1980 when the lake dried up due to a severe drought. Fishermen discarded their boats to farm the newly revealed land. Cormorant keepers, however, were not keen to give up their birds. With borrowed money, Chang Dai travelled south to Poyang Lake in Jiangxi Province, taking with him the boat and birds. He spent eight years there before finally returning home in 1988, when Baiyangdian Lake was again filled with water.

After a little over two hours, the cormorants awoke and chirped excitedly. I could tell we were approaching home. The sun was setting as the boats came together to divide the catch. Though those with more cormorants had a bigger harvest, the fish was divided evenly among the people present and even I had a share. Chang explained to me: "Fishing with cormorants is like hunting. Brotherhood and loyalty are what count most."







### Simple Wedding and an Elaborate Meal

When we stepped ashore, Chang Dai invited me to a wedding feast. "It's my niece getting married. And we believe friends and relatives from afar will bring good luck to the newly weds. It would be a great honour if you came."

On the way to the wedding, I saw women making reed mats in front of their houses while their men squatted by, smoking their pipes. Reeds at Baiyangdian provide another source of income to the local people. They are cut using a sickle attached to the end of a long bamboo pole. The workmen reach their sickles deep into the water to cut the plants near the roots, and then bring them up. It takes a great deal of energy and is always done by men. Chang told me that once the reeds are brought in, the drying, crushing and weaving are done entirely by women. As Baiyangdian has a big population with very little land, weaving mats has become the most important side-line occupation for the local women. The very skilled can make two or even three large hand-made mats each day. Most of the mats are sold to the Northeast for building granaries, because they admit air and preserve the grain better. Some of the mats are sold overseas by way of Tianjin.

We walked into a courtyard which was already packed with people and filled with a festive mood. Chang introduced me to the crowd. The bride and bridegroom came over, each with a broad smile on the face. I bowed and said: "Please accept my good wishes from afar." There was happiness and excitement on the faces of Zhang Kehua, the bridegroom, and Xia Fengling, the bride.

The wedding was quite simple but with a

marked difference from other places: the bride had 20 bridesmaids who would spend that night with her in order to test the patience of the bridegroom. The dowry in the bridal chamber was also quite ordinary, but the wedding feast was very unusual. Take the small bowl of boiled pancake for example. As soon as it was brought to the table it made me wonder: "Just how does the soup remain so clear with such soft shredded pancakes in the bowl?" As I ate, I kept wondering: "How did the pancake get this wonderful taste?" I asked one of young man sitting near me, he replied: "It is not an easily made soup. You have to make the pancake the day before to let it dry overnight. After cutting them into shreds, they are put in a strainer with boiling broth spooned onto them until they are soaked thoroughly. The shredded pancake is then put into a bowl. The clear soup cooked in another pot is then added, and the tasteful pancake soup is ready. Am I right, classmate?" The bridegroom happened to be passing and nodded his head in agreement. Everybody fell into a laugh. It turned out that both the bridegroom and the bestman were professional cooks.

Xia Laosan, who owned the village's coffin shop, pulled at my jacket and whispered to me: "Weddings are never as elaborate as funerals at Baiyangdian." Sensing my scepticism, he went on: "If you don't believe me, go and watch the funeral at Zhaozhuangzi Village tomorrow."



1. This double happiness character is pasted with money, a special custom of Baiyangdian.
2. "Shrimp cake" — a local delicacy
3. Quantou Village is on the largest of the 97 small islands in Baiyangdian Lake.
4. People at Baiyangdian make a greater deal of funerals than weddings.



*Funerals at Baiyangdian are more professed than weddings. Paper figures are burned, the mourning shed is built. Family members of the deceased cried their hearts out in the shed while outside the sonorous beating of gongs and drums echoes through the air. Once they have buried the coffin, however, they do not even bother to erect a memorial tablet at the grave.*



### Funeral: Bold and Unrestrained Local Customs

An elderly man had died, and the funeral was conducted over three days. A series of memorial ceremonies were held, which included burning paper figures, building sheds for mourning the deceased, a funeral parade and sacrificial services. Oddly, the funeral processes were anything but quiet. Apart from the beating of gongs and drums, there were also lion dancing, stilt walking and opera singing. The entire village came and watched. On the third day, the deceased was buried. His coffin lay in the centre of the funeral shed. In front of the coffin were sacrificial items flanked on either side by four characters, which were actually pasted with nothing but 10-yuan notes. Family members of the deceased cried their hearts out in the shed while outside the sonorous beating of gongs and drums echoed through the air.

As the coffin was lifted, firecrackers were set off. The funeral

procession went through the village to the west bank of the lake where two specially decorated funeral boats, arranged neck to neck, were waiting. Family members knelt down around the coffin as the scene was overtaken with silent mourning, which seemed to spread out onto the water. After travelling several kilometres, the boats reached the village's public cemetery near Zhaobeikou. Having buried the coffin, however, nobody bothered to erect a memorial tablet.

During my stay at Baiyangdian, I found that all the people I came across were straightforward and unconstrained. Baiyangdian Lake was on the border of the states of Yan and Zhao 2,000 years ago. Yan and Zhao have been home to generous and gallant heroes. Are the characteristics of the Baiyangdian people simply a generic heritage? Or is it just a traditional local lifestyle?

Translated by F. Huang

### Tips for the Traveller:

**Transport:** It can be reached from Beijing (150 kilometres), Tianjin (160 km), Shijiazhuang (150 km) and Baoding (45 km). There are daily long-distance bus services connecting Baiyangdian and these places. There is a bus setting out from Baoding every hour. At noon, a daily ship service leaves Dongguan Wharf for Quantou Village.

**Accommodation:** Visitors can check into the hotels in the county seat,

such as the Anxin Hotel or the Baiyang Hotel. The daily rate for a standard room is 100-150 yuan. Visitors to Quantou Village may stay at the hostel run by the local Supply and Sales Cooperative at a daily rate of 10 yuan per person.

The best travel time: summer and autumn. In summer, lotus is in full bloom; in autumn, snow-white reed blossoms top the plants, and fish is in abundance.



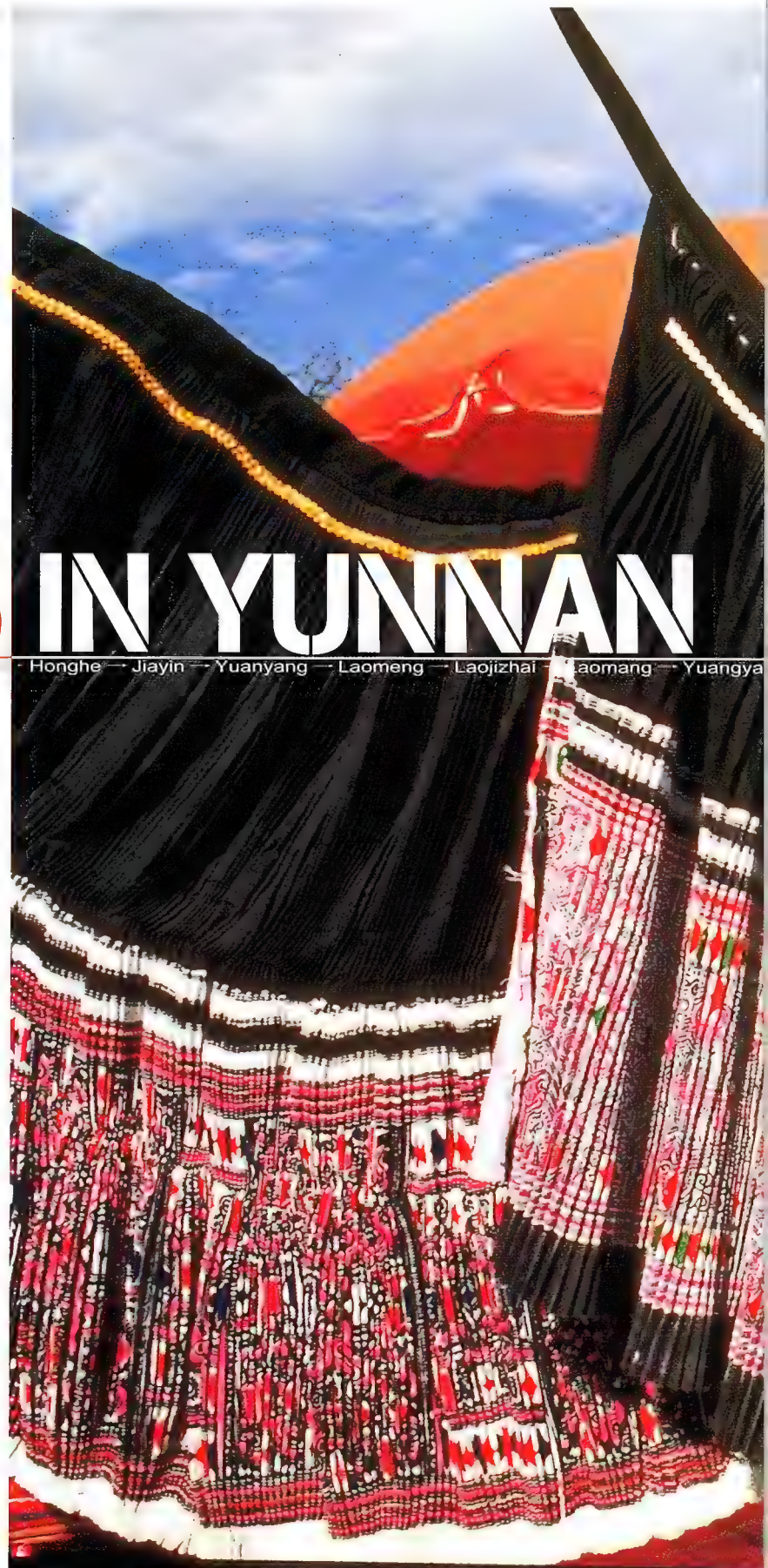




# VISIT VILLAGES IN YUNNAN

In December 1997, I made a bumpy trip to the Honghe Prefecture on the Sino-Vietnamese border with a friend, to visit a number of mountain villages. In the short space of 10 days, we witnessed the numerous and varied customs of three different ethnic groups. The trip was indeed an eye-opener.

*Photos & article by Zhong Jintang*











## December 18, Kunming to Gejiu

Early in the morning, we excitedly boarded a medium-sized sleeper coach at the Nanyao Bus Station in Kunming, heading for Gejiu. The total distance of the journey is about 300 kilometres. We imagined we ought to arrive in Gejiu at around 3:00 in the afternoon.

But our plan fell through. When the coach got to Kaiyuan, the other passengers all left, leaving only the two of us on the bus. The driver decided it was not worth his while taking us on any further, and so he smilingly ushered us to a nearby coach, and "sold" us together with our luggage to the second coach.

Unfortunately, it turned out that there were no spare seats left on the second bus, except for those flip-up ones along the passageway. Desperate to keep to our schedule, we reluctantly complied. We had not counted on there being another bad turn of events, but after less than half an hour on the steep road, we crashed into a large bus coming the other way, shattering the windscreen and damaging the radiator. Fortunately nobody was hurt.

We hailed another coach at extra expense, and it had already gone 5:00 p.m. before we finally arrived at Gejiu, where we spent the night.

## December 19, Gejiu to Jinping

We took the 7:10 bus to Jinping County, about 180

kilometres away. Passing the Manhao Border Inspection Station, the bus began to drive on a mountain highway. More and more villagers boarded, making the overloading problem even more serious. The woman selling tickets seemed not to notice it at all. Whenever someone wanted to get a lift, she asked the driver to stop, and then shouted at those by the door to move up to the rear part of the bus. As a result, a medium-sized coach intended to carry some 20 people was actually carrying closer to 40.

Thank goodness! We managed to safely arrive at the Jinping bus station at 2:00 p.m. Before the bus pulled to a full stop, a crowd of Hani women rushed to it. It turned out that they were porters, offering to carry the passengers' luggage. When we got down, we pointed at our bags and two quick Hani women deftly placed them in their large baskets, hauling them onto their backs.

Following the two women, we passed a few village houses and walked along a small trail through a field. It took about 20 minutes before we finally arrived at the county government hostel, where we were to spend the night.

We added a small tip to the 1-yuan fee for carrying the luggage, and bade farewell to the two women, who left pleased.







3

## December 20, Jinping to Mengla Township

From early in the morning to late at night, a great number of Hani women gather at the central square in the Jinping county seat, offering to carry goods so as to earn some money to support their families. They stand in queues, waiting for people to hire them, a large basket woven with bamboo slips and a straw-woven back cushion resting on their backs.

Not far from them were many "Gangtian" vehicles — a sort of passenger tricycle refitted with a motorbike.

Learning that there was to be a rural fair in Mengla, we hired a "Gangtian" and rushed to the market. In line with local tradition, there is a county fair every five days. We walked along with the crowds and took pictures of the things that interested us: peddlers selling sundry goods; people selling draught animals; small shop owners selling food and beverages; people hawking clothing; and the many onlookers who came just for fun.

On our way back to the county seat, we visited a small workshop making candied cakes of popped rice. The boss belongs to the Yi ethnic group and was hospitable towards us.

Previous page, smaller: Yi girls of the Alu clan

Previous page, bigger: Colourful batik skirts on sale at the fair in Mengla

1. Making silver coins a part of the headgear might be an invention of Alu mothers.
2. One of the 18 bizarre sights in Yunnan: a bamboo-tube smoking water pipe.
3. A restaurant in Laojizhai serving special dishes of local styles
4. Yi women of the Alu clan selling purple rice cooked in a certain plant juice
5. Eggs are sold by stringing them together with straws.











Besides treating us to with the newly produced cakes, he allowed us to photograph the whole production process.

## December 21, Jinping to Ping'an Village via Shili Village

Shili Village is a small settlement in the mountains to the south of the Jinping county seat. Through this village, one can reach several other small villages deep in the mountains. Though the distance from the county seat to Shili Village was only a little over 10 kilometres, it took us an hour to cover because of the rugged mountain road.

The fare was 3 yuan, travelling aboard a kind of

1. In Manhao Township, bananas are piled up like small hills.
2. In villages of Hongtou Yaos, such a sewing machine is considered fairly modern.
3. Hongtou Yao women have their heads shaved bald like nuns.
4. Shack frames specially erected for sunning rice
5. Yi women of the Alu clan are good at weaving colourful belts.



small truck. It had only one seat beside the driver, so the passengers had to stand at the back. We made a deal with the driver, agreeing to pay him 60 yuan for the trip to and from Shili Village.

Normally, the driver drops his passengers at the gate of the Shili Village and returns to the county seat, simply because the road in the village is in such poor condition. Standing at the back, I knew exactly what was meant by "paying money for hardships". The moment the truck entered the village, it jumped and jolted like a mad horse. It was more than an hour before we managed to reach Ping'an Village, about 20 kilometres from the Jinping county seat.

The village is home to 280-300 households of Hongtou Yaos. When informed of the purpose of our visit, they warmly welcomed us as their guests. The villager who hosted us was called Deng Wenzhang, an intelligent and refined farmer. When he heard that we would like to take some photos, he immediately asked his family members to change into their best traditional Yao costumes.

We took pictures for all his family on my Polaroid camera. The instant photos it produced brought real joy to both the family and their neighbours.

The Deng family treated us to lunch. Afterwards, we took more pictures of their life, before thanking them and returning to the county seat.

## December 22, Jinping to Taiyang Village

We got up in the morning and looked out of the window. Heavy rain and mist blocked out the horizon, dampening our spirits. We waited impatiently till 8:00 a.m., at which point thankfully the mist cleared and the rain eased. However, the sky was still gloomy. "We can't stay inside all day," I thought to myself. I looked up towards the mountain road. It was more than half an hour before motor vehicles finally appeared, indicating that the previous



Ping'an Village  
Hongtou Yaos of Ping'an Village were pleased by the instant pictures produced by the Polaroid camera.





YUANYANG IS WELL-KNOWN FOR ITS TERRACED FIELDS. THE MAGNIFICENT SCENERY BROUGHT ME TO TEARS.

night's heavy rain had not caused much damage to the road. Overjoyed, we fetched our bags and rushed to Taiyang Village, in the opposite direction to the village we had visited yesterday.

Our luck seemed to have improved when we managed to rent a four-wheel-drive jeep with six seats. We had hoped to avoid a repeat of the previous days' "involuntary disco" on the truck, but it turned out to be no better.

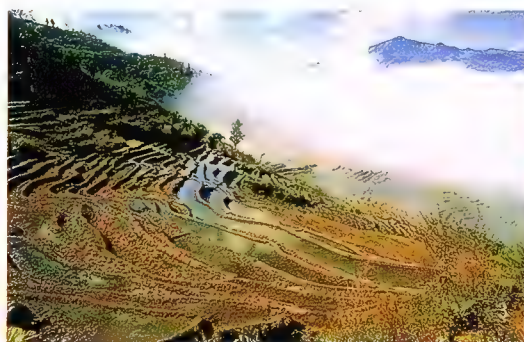
The road to Taiyang Village was rugged and dangerous. One slight mistake would have sent the jeep down a deep valley — no wonder we had been unable to bargain with the veteran driver. Due to the rain, the road was muddy, and even with four-wheel-drive the jeep skidded on more than one occasion. Every now and then, we had to get out and push. The harsh conditions meant it would take more than two hours to cover the 30 kilometres.

When we approached the village, about 20 bare-footed young lads wearing blue clothes and green army caps started running towards our jeep, taking great interest in the vehicle. We were later informed that very few outsiders came to this poor village, and a primary school was in the process of being built with aid from the United Nations.

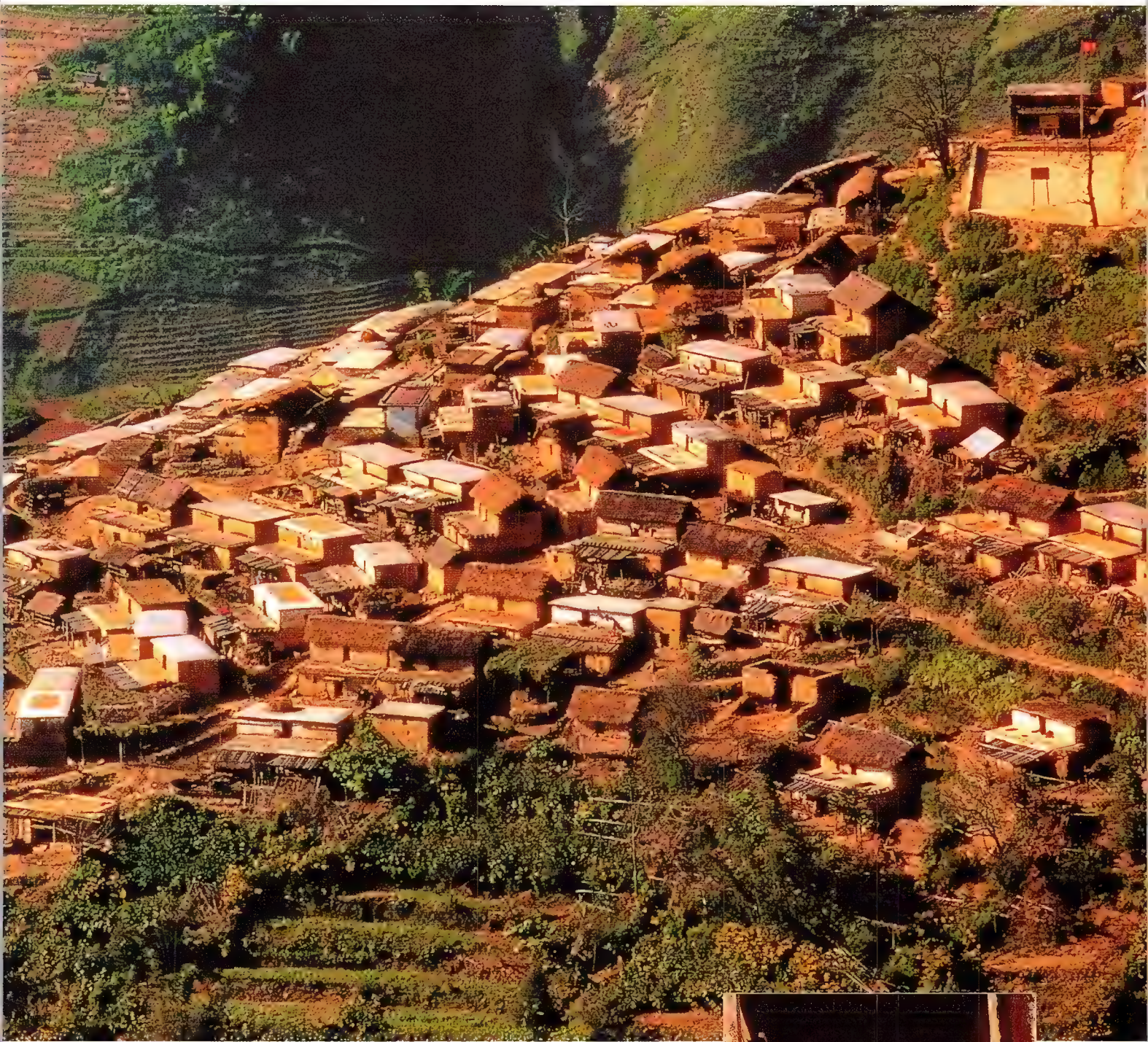
There are some 300 households of Landian (Blue) Yaos living in the Taiyang Village in relatively spacious houses. As we had seen for ourselves, transport is difficult, and the villagers are mainly engaged in crop farming. The Landian Yaos have a bright and cheerful disposition. While women villagers talked to us with high-pitched voices, the little girls made faces and played with us. Obviously, these are a people enthusiastic and easy to get along with.

## December 22, Jinping to Honghe County

To make the most of our time, we rented a small coach, complete with driver and assistant. Mr. Liu, the



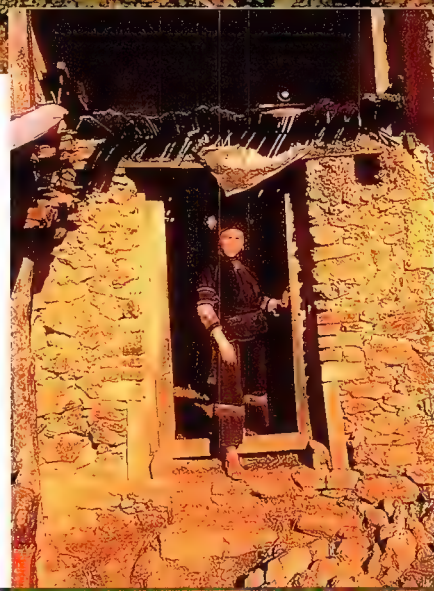




driver, was the owner of the coach, and he was something of a "know-it-all". When we told him we were interested in taking some pictures of the local customs and the minority ethnic groups, he came out with a torrent of information. Mr. Liu served as both our driver and guide during the next few days.

The distance from Jinping to the Honghe county seat was somewhere between 200-300 kilometres. Of particular note was a small town we passed on the way

1. The attire for the Landian Yaos in Taiyang Village differs greatly from that for the Hongtou Yaos.
2. A time-honoured village for Yis of the Alu clan
3. Amidst clouds and mist, the terraced fields on the mountain slopes in Yuanyang look even more enchanting.
4. Landian Yao women dressed in a different style
5. Earthen houses for Yis of the Alu dan







known as Manhao. We stopped at a banana wholesale market in the town, where I saw more bananas than I had ever seen in my entire life.

We reached Honghe, a town perched high in the mountains, at 6:00 p.m.

## December 24, Honghe to Jiayin Township

The scenery on the way from the county seat of Honghe to Jiayin Township is marvellous. We

crossed large tracts of banana farms, Honghe County being renowned for the production of this fruit. Honghe literally means "the Red River". From our coach, we could see the red water of the Honghe River flowing. Its colour comes from the red earth it carries, hence its name.

Our coach travelled through a long stretch of terraced fields on the way to Jiayin, a small town on top of a mountain. When our coach went through clouds on the mountain highway, we felt as if we ourselves were flying in the sky.

## December 25, Jiayin to Yuanyang, then to Laomeng

On our way from Jiayin to Yuanyang County, we came to realise just how drastically man can change nature. High in the rumbling mountains are endless





terraced fields, for which Yuanyang County has long been famous. To me, a man who has spent nearly his entire life in the "concrete jungle" of Hong Kong, the magnificent landscape was particularly enchanting.

Let me confide in you: when I saw the amazing scenery of the terraced fields with my own eyes, I was moved to tears, and could not help shouting at the top of my voice. During the following hours, after taking rolls and rolls of photos, I still could not calm myself.

## December 26, Laomeng to Laojizhai Township

Over the previous three days, we had taken reels of photos of the incredible landscape. While being impressed, we also wished to experience something different for a change. Seeming to read our minds, our driver took us out of Laomeng and into a mountain valley in the Laojizhai Township.

Having passed a Y-junction, we entered the village, inhabited by the Alu clan of the Yi ethnic group. Two men, Liu and Lu, accompanied us on our trip. Mr. Lu was himself a Yi, making him the ideal guide for this trip.

We drove into the village and were hosted by the head, Li Kesheng, a dark and sturdy man in his 30s. The hospitable village head, who had served at this post for quite a few years, first briefed us about the village, a subject about which he was obviously well informed.

Laojizhai is an administrative village, under which are 13 natural villages and 17 agricultural co-operatives. The total population is 4,521, all of whom are Yis of the Alu clan, mainly engaged in crop farming.

It was already lunch time when Mr. Li finished the briefing. Lunch was ready and he offered us a drink. The Yis are extraordinary drinkers, using large bowls instead of small cups. I informed him that I neither smoke nor drink, and, realising I was being serious, Li let me pass.

## December 27, Laojizhai to Laomeng

We spent the morning in a crowded country fair at Laojizhai. As the village is located on a major traffic junction, there were a great number of people there. We were told that those villagers who lived far away had to get up extremely early in the morning to hurry to the fair, as the journey takes three to four hours on foot. Most of the people present, including the peddlers, were Yis of the Alu clan. Of course, there were also Hanis, Yaos and Miaos, as well as Hans.

After lunch, we were led to a Dai village in Laomeng Township. The village was composed of over a dozen bamboo cottages, traditional residential buildings for the Dais and a primary school. Mr. Liu introduced us to a beautiful young girl called Mao Zhen. She is a dance teacher who has taught in the village for many years. Her monthly salary is only 100 yuan, but she has held firmly to her job.

## December 28, Laomeng to Yuanyang, then to Kunming

After 10 days, we felt exhausted, and more to the point, my friend had to go back to work. Therefore, we reluctantly bade farewell to Laomeng Township and returned to Yuanyang, where we took a sleeper coach back to Kunming.

*Translated by Li Zhenguo*

1. Alu Yis hurrying to a country fair in the morning mist
2. Sweet potatoes, one of the major produces of Yuanyang County
3. Every Yi male of the Alu clan can play the lusheng, a reed-pipe wind instrument. It is particularly important for the young, as it may affect their dating and marriage later.
4. Young males of the Yao ethnic group in Laojizhai pay more attention to their dresses than the girls.
5. A Bamboo tower belonging to a Dai family in the Laomeng Township



IN A DAI VILLAGE OF LAOMENG, A YOUNG WOMAN TEACHER EARNS LITTLE, YET SHE STICKS TO HER POST ...





# Yuanji Exercises on Lianhua Mountain

Photos by Hua Kai Article by Xing Lin

The name of Lianhua (Lotus) Mountain has become popular at home and abroad over the past years. This could be because this is where the Jingtū (Pure Land) Sect of Chinese Buddhism originated, or because Sun Quan, a ruler of one of the Three Kingdoms, once established his capital here. But actually, its popularity is owed to “Yuanji”, a new emerging branch of study.



## Yuanji Hall, a Magnetic Field

The peaks and ridges of the Lianhua (Lotus) Mountain have remained unchanged but the recently erected pagodas, towers, pavilions and platforms have given the area a new feature. Entering the temple gate, we saw about 100 people dancing on the “Eight Trigrams Field” by the Yuanji Hall. The dance is unique, known as the “Flowering of the Golden Lotus”. Developed by the temple's residents, it combines fitness exercises, martial art skills and recreation into one. One round is enough to make any one feel mentally and physically relaxed.

The Lianhua Hall is even more mysterious. When one enters it and stands within the lotus flower pattern on the floor, one is automatically overcome with a content feeling of floating. This is caused by what people have dubbed “the unique magnetic and biological effect”. The result is an imperceptible regulatory influence on one's mentality and



**The emergence of Yuanji  
has made Lianhua Mountain  
even more famous.**

physique.

Yuanming Pagoda was built on top of the Fushou Hill. Inside, a round column reaches from ground level to the roof. A staircase spirals around the column, leading visitors to the top floor, where they are rewarded by incredible panoramic views of the beautiful scenery of the Lianhua Mountain. At the other end, the Daoxiang Pavilion at the foot of the pagoda contains an exhibition. The works on display are traditional Chinese paintings, calligraphic works and handicrafts, all based on the theory of Yuanji study.

Liuhe Garden is a more exciting place to visit. Various auspicious animals and birds are raised there, including green-hair tortoises, thousand-year-old tortoises, sikas, and golden-hair monkeys, all symbols of longevity and good fortune. Intriguingly, the green-hair tortoises can even dance and swim to the rhythm of the Yuanji music!



## Yuanji Medicine: Inducing a Balance in the Human Body

At Lianhua Mountain, tourists can enjoy Yuanji music with varying melodies, performed at different times of the day and in a number of locations. The rhythm of the melodies is said to be in full harmony with the breath and the flow of blood in the human body. Listening to this special kind of music can help one cheer up and become free from worries. When the flow of *qi* (air) and blood is promoted, the basic condition of the body is improved. This is surely better than using tonics.

Attracted to the Yuanji music, we, too, stepped into the ring and danced to the melody together with the others.

It is no accident that the Lianhua Mountain has become the base of Yuanji study. Scientific researches have found that the area has a unique field of geomagnetism, which has the effect of harmonising the mental and physical state, eliminating diseases and benefiting people's health. Cases have been reported of patients that found their diseases cured after staying at Lianhua Mountain for a period of time. This gave rise to Yuanji medicine.

Yuanji medicine is based on Yuanji study, which emphasises the integrity between man and nature. That is to view the world by



focusing on the mutual relations and influence between man and his environment. The theory of Yuanji study holds that the original substances of the universe are primary *qi*, primary light and primary sound.

I am not sure I truly understand the abstruse doctrine of Yuanji, but I have learned a little about Yuanji medicine.

The most popular interpretation of Yuanji medicine is as follows: based on the primary *qi*, light and sound, Yuanji medicine treats people by combining these three intangible elements

with tangible medications in order to induce a physical and mental balance in the human body. I believe that anyone who goes to the Lianhua Mountain to study and seek treatment, or to attend various seminars and training classes, will gain a better understanding of Yuanji.

*Translated by Li Zhenguo*

**The melody and rhythm of Yuanji music are in perfect harmony with the breath and the flow of blood in the human body. Extended exposure to the music can free people from worry, and greatly benefit one's physical and mental health.**

### Location of Lianhua Mountain



1. Some 10,000 people get together in the early morning to do Yuanji exercises on Lianhua Mountain.
2. The Yuanji Gate and Nine-Dragon Altar
3. Yuanji exercises in the Eight Trigrams Field
4. Strong geomagnetism in the area is conducive to physical and mental balance.
5. Attending a lecture on Yuanji study
6. Feeling the effect of heaven and earth

### Tips for the Traveller

Lianhua Mountain is 68 kilometres from Wuhan, capital of Central China's Hubei Province. Both bus and train services are available from Wuhan to Lianhua Mountain.

At the mountain, one can choose to stay either in a star-rated hotel or a dormitory for students. Restaurants, canteens and shops are provided and the environment is good for both long stays and short visits.



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# The

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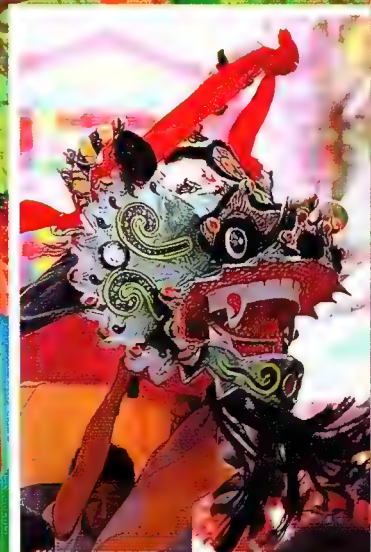
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Photos & article by Chan Yat Nin

# Bun Festival in Cheung Chau



The exquisitely-decorated "theatre" Insert: Unicorn dance.



Cheung Chau, a 2.4-square-kilometre outlying island situated to the southwest of Hong Kong Island, is a city dwellers' paradise: there are no skyscrapers, no vehicles and none of the disturbance of modern city life. However, in the fourth lunar month each year, this quiet island is transformed into a hive of activity when the fascinating Bun Festival, Cheung Chau's main claim to fame, takes place.

## A HARBOUR FREE FROM THE COMMOTION OF THE CITY

Cheung Chau is 12 kilometres from Hong Kong Island, and it takes around an hour to get there by ferry. When the Bun Festival is not in full swing, visitors are soaked in the atmosphere of a typical fishing village.

Cheung Chau looks very similar to a dumbbell: it was formed by two separate islets linked together by a gradually-accumulated sand bank. As a result, both the north and south ends of the island are hilly while the central region, the isthmus, is narrow and flat, providing an ideal location for housing. To the east of the isthmus is Tung Wan, a beautiful beach with clear water and soft sand, while to the west is a pier with Chinese-style fishing boats shuttling to and fro. The distance between the two spots is only 200 metres.

Strolling along the maze-like lanes on the island, you feel as if you have been taken back to a fishing village lost in time. The majority of the stalls lining both sides of the lanes sell seafood and dried sea produce; a fishy whiff assails your nose as you pass them. The rest are groceries and various restaurants.

Though the lanes zigzag, visitors will not get lost — simply remember that the main streets on the islands run from north to south down the narrow isthmus. Following them in either direction will bring you to the two main tourist attractions on the island: the Tin Hau Temple in the south, dedicated to Tin Hau, the Goddess of the Sea, and the Pak Tai Temple to the north, where the Lord of the North (Pak Tai), the fishermen's patron deity, is enshrined and worshipped.

Since Cheung Chau enjoys such tranquillity and ambience, it has emerged as a popular holiday resort for townsfolk. Many people, including some foreigners, even settle in Cheung Chau, treating this small island as their home town.



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1. Tung Wan Beach — a picturesque tourist spot on the island
2. Fishing boats berthed in the bay
3. The gigantic bun towers
4. Villagers carrying the statue of Tin Hau in the parade







## THE BUN FESTIVAL: ENTERTAINING GODS, SPIRITS AND MEN

The annual *Tai ping Qingjiao* (Peaceful Taoist Sacrificial Ceremony), better known as the Bun Festival in English, is a thrilling carnival for the islanders. Each year, the peaceful fishing village is converted into a place bursting with joy and excitement: the bay is packed with fishing boats and yachts from near and afar; the streets are decorated with colourful flags; tens of thousands of tourists from Hong Kong and overseas pour into the area, bringing liveliness and jubilation to the island.

In high spirits, the inhabitants of Cheung Chau begin their preparations several days before the grand ceremony. Scaffolds are erected and decorated with multi-coloured paper flowers contributed by various associations and neighbourhood committees. Written on them are prayers for luck and good health, messages offering thanks for gods' blessing, and the names of the contributors. On the square outside the Pak Tai Temple, a bamboo stage and a temporary altar are built, and three gigantic "bun towers" are erected.

During the festival, there is a tradition that the residents stop slaughtering and give up meat for three days. Most of the restaurants on the island serve only vegetarian foods in this period of fasting. Respecting the local customs, foreigners living there generally follow suit.

Opinions vary concerning the origins of the Bun Festival. The







prevalent theory goes like this: in the middle of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), Cheung Chau was devastated by a storm, followed by an outbreak of the plague which claimed many lives. The island was believed to be haunted. In view of this, a sacrificial ceremony was performed by the inhabitants, on the one hand to placate the lingering spirits of the dead, on the other hand to pray for the gods' favour for the living. The island was clear thereafter. This tradition passed on from generation to generation and has now transformed into a major Chinese festival held in the fourth lunar month.

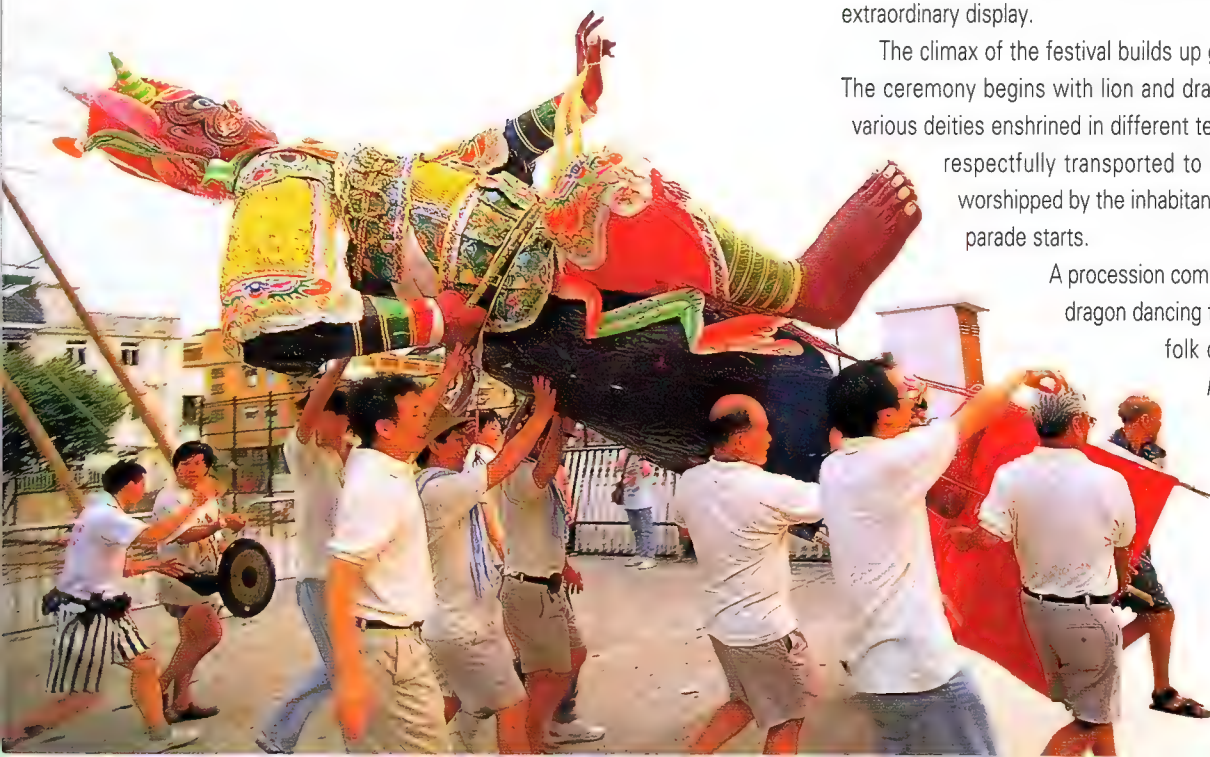
In fact, the original ritual of the Bun Festival has undergone some changes. In the past, the festival reached its climax with the rite of "snatching the bun towers", in which villagers competed with each other in scrambling up the mountains to grab the lucky buns. However, following an accident in the 1970s when the bun towers collapsed causing injuries, the rite ceased. Buns are now distributed, and an exhilarating parade has replaced the rite as the climax of the festival. Meanwhile, the objective of this Taoist service has changed too. Formerly, the aim was to pay homage to the gods and to placate the ghosts, but now the living are also considered.

## THE FASCINATING 'FLOAT PROCESSION' — PIAOSE

The ceremony is held in the open area outside Pak Tai Temple, and the venue is crowded with people early in the morning. The three giant bun towers, 16 metres high, are covered with numerous white buns, each garnished with a red mark. They are called the "nether buns", as no one can eat them until the ghosts have had their fill, but are also referred to as the "lucky buns", since the locals believe that eating the buns will bring them good luck. Traditional Cantonese opera is performed on the stage at the centre of the square day and night throughout the festival. The temporary altar is decorated with several enormous effigies of deities and giant incense sticks, creating an extraordinary display.

The climax of the festival builds up gradually from the afternoon. The ceremony begins with lion and dragon dancing. The statues of various deities enshrined in different temples on the island are then respectfully transported to the square, where they are worshipped by the inhabitants. Soon after, the impressive parade starts.

A procession composed of members of lion and dragon dancing teams, martial art performers, folk dancers, and children of the *Piaose* parade representing various organisations start out from the square of the Pak Tai Temple, proceeding along the main streets lined with an enthusiastic audience.







They head towards the open area outside the Tin Hau Temple, the "stage" for these entertainers. Guests and overseas visitors gather here to admire the spectacular performances.

Overseas travellers are astonished by the *Piaose* (literally, "Floating Colours"), or the "Float Procession": children dressed up as characters from Chinese folklore — heroes, fairies, demons, scholars and beauties, as well as modern celebrities. They "float" shoulder-high above the crowd to the bewilderment of foreigners: how can the children "stand" on a cup, a paper fan, or even the tip of a sword? The truth is that each of the young performers is actually safely secured by an exquisitely-designed steel frame camouflaged with delicate props, creating the illusion that the children are "gliding through the air". The parents are proud of their kids being elected as a *Piaose* performer as they believe the child will be blessed.

The carnival still carries on in spite of the end of the procession. Several lion dancing teams entertain the crowd by showing their superb skills. Villages in the parade carrying the statues of deities in sedans compete with each other to send the "gods" back to the temporary altar for good luck, and devotees follow to flock to the altar, praying and offering sacrifices to the gods.

1. The God of Wealth wishing everybody affluence
2. A paper sacrifice dedicated to the spirits
3. Carrying the effigy of the King of Ghosts to the ceremony
4. Statuettes of deities enshrined in the altar
5. A "nether feast" for the lingering spirits







3

## EXOTIC SACRIFICIAL CEREMONY AND BUN DISTRIBUTION

At dusk, in Pak Tai Temple's square, dozens of "nether feasts" are prepared — sacrifices composed of food, wine and daily necessities dedicated to the spirits of the victims of all kinds of disasters. Taoist monks pray for the ghosts so as to placate them; villagers burn incense sticks in front of the sacrifice, inviting the lingering spirits to enjoy the offerings. The surrounding spectators get the feeling that they, too, have entered the nether world.

Fifteen minutes to midnight and the rite is brought to its climax: the paper effigy of the "King of Ghosts" is set on fire in the open area. Without waiting for the extinction of the bonfire, the islanders hurry to grab the offerings of the nether feasts. According to local beliefs, the sacrifices will bring peace to them.

At midnight, the crowd gathers around the bun towers. This was formerly the time to snatch the buns, but today the buns are distributed. All the same, the inhabitants of the island still look forward to this annual event. Several men climb up the immense bun towers to "harvest" the buns with long hooked sticks. They are collected in large bamboo baskets and distributed to the villagers, who are pleased to have a share of these auspicious buns.

Most travellers disperse after this rite, but the locals stay on for the performances staged on the temporary "theatre" throughout the night, immersing themselves in the jovial atmosphere.

*Translated by Jess Tang*

### TIPS FOR THE TRAVELLER:

**Transportation:** Catch a ferry to Cheung Chau from the Outer Islands Pier in Central.

Duration: About an hour by ferry; 30 minutes by hovercraft.

Frequency: Off-peak (10:00-17:00) — ferry leaves every hour;  
peak (before 10:00, 17:00-20:00) — ferry leaves every half hour;  
last ferry from Cheung Chau — 23:30;  
from Hong Kong — 00:30.

**Accommodation:** There are many holiday villas available for rent on the island, or alternatively you can stay in Warwick Hotel, the island's only hotel.

1. A Qing-dynasty scholar    2. An energetic athlete    3. A beautiful fairy
4. Dressing one of the young performers
5. Burning the effigy of the King of Ghosts in a bonfire
6. Islanders burning incense in front of the huge effigy of the King of Ghosts







Wo Shun Lane  
和順里



Aiming High in Life —

# Rock Climbing in Kunming

*Photos by Li Zhixiong*

*Article by Hua Yu*





Rock climbing? To a city dweller like me, it is the most adventurous and exciting sport. When some friends from the Kunming Mountain Climbing Association invited me on trip, I did not hesitate to join them.

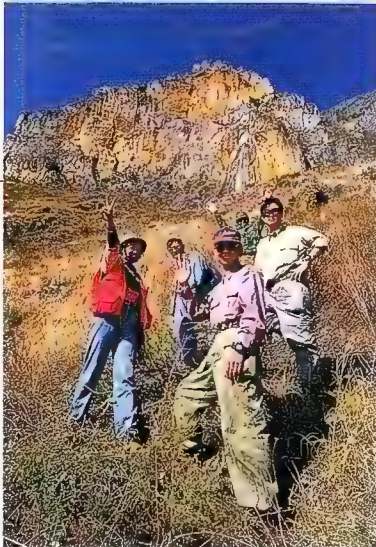
Early on the morning of February 28, we met at a deserted quarry in Xishan (West Hills) in the outskirts of Kunming. Terrifying peaks towered over us. The slopes looked extremely hard to climb — far steeper than anything I had attempted before. But what could I do? Having come this far, retreat was not an option. I had to brace myself and go forward.

### **Pulled Up over a Huge Rock**

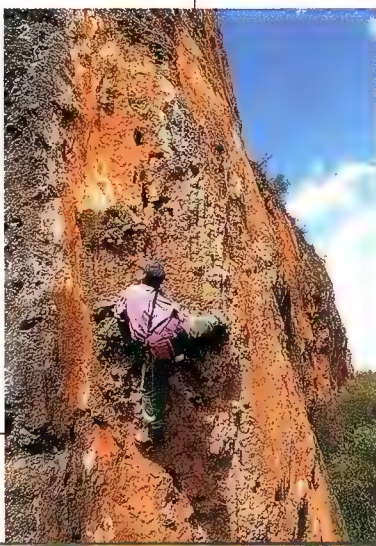
Our climb was made even harder by the fact that the man who was supposed to bring the main rope had not shown up. We had no choice but to climb the cliff with bare hands. However, my fear was curbed by the presence of the climbing veterans, Zhang Shi, Tian Yi, Shu Tao and Kong Yufeng, who, I was told, had climbed some of the most challenging mountains before.

Once the climbing route was chosen, we went into action. There was no trail at all so we had to force our way through the undergrowth. No one in the team had ever taken this route up the mountain. After a while we found ourselves surrounded by disorderly weeds and rocks, unable to see neither the peak ahead, nor the way we had come. A scorching sun beat down and I was soaked through with sweat. Even my throat was sore. Exhausted, I moved ahead mechanically.

Skill is of vital importance in rock climbing. Your four limbs mean four potential footholds on the rock face. When climbing, you have to make sure that the other three are secured in their footholds before you move one of your limbs. Being a green hand, I was unable to find enough footholds on the rock face. Seeing me struggling, Zhang Shi let a rope down, which I tied around my left wrist. While Zhang was pulling me up, Tian Yi stretched out his arms and let me use his palms as footholds. I slowly ascended in this manner. When I tired, I took a short rest by pressing my body tightly against the rock face like a lizard. This was a method that rock climbers used to take a break, but I was unable to relax. Panting with my mouth wide open, sweat streamed down my forehead, blurring my sight. The



**When I climbed  
higher and higher,  
I looked around,  
and was overwhelmed  
by the exhilarating  
scenes below.  
Cars and trucks  
on the road  
looked like beetles,  
and Lake Dianchi  
appeared calm  
and quiet  
in a light mist.**



pain in my calf muscles grew worse. Finally, I was pulled up over that huge rock with my eyes closed.

### **Dangerous Climbing**

When I climbed higher and higher, I looked around, and was overwhelmed by the exhilarating scenes below. Cars and trucks on the road looked like beetles. Enveloped in a light mist, Lake Dianchi appeared calm and quiet. Having confined myself to the cement jungle of the city for so long, I was extremely excited to be back with nature. It felt so refreshing and relaxing!

Around mid-day, we reached a mountain fold near a radar station. Engrossed in climbing, I suddenly heard a crack. When I looked up, I found that Zhang Shi, a dozen metres from me, had lost his grip and was slipping down a rope from the cliff. In a split second, he disappeared from my sight. I gaped, not knowing what to do.

Fortunately, the other climbers had all gone through strict training, and knew exactly how to deal with emergencies and how to help one another when something unexpected happened. As Zhang was climbing up, Tian Yi had been watching carefully beneath him. So he was well prepared to be at Zhang's rescue. By stretching out one of his legs, Tian effectively reduced Zhang's downward slipping speed, leaving the lucky Zhang with only minor injuries on his ankles.

This served as a warning to everybody. Again we stressed the importance of safety for the rest of the trip. Tian Yi produced equipment and various gadgets such as safety belts, harnesses and brackets from his kit and demonstrated how to use them. They looked rather ordinary but were in fact very expensive. That equipment kit cost Tian well over 10,000 yuan. Though it is rather dear, it saves lives. Looking at it this way, it is certainly money well spent.

Climbing cliffs like this is of course fraught with danger. Yet every one in the group was in a light, joyous mood. While climbing, they chattered and laughed heartily. To those guys, I was sure, a job was only a means of survival — mountain

**Left page: A thrilling climb — bare-footed and bare-handed!**

- 1. The steep cliffs in the West Hills of Kunming are favoured by rock climbers.**
- 2. You have to secure three of your limbs before you move the fourth.**





climbing was their real joy of life.

At noon, we climbed up a peak full of strangely-shaped boulders. When we reached the top, a wide open space stretched out before us. Two peaks stood facing each other. There was a huge crack in one of them, probably a few dozen metres long. Partially covered by thick foliage, it looked gloomy, ghastly and, I must admit, frightening. We named this huge mountain crack at 2,060 metres above sea level "No. 1 Great Crack in the Xishan Hills".

We moved onto a rocky ridge. Shortly after four o'clock in the afternoon, we reached the mountain top. A delightful breeze swept across us as we relaxed.

It was even harder to climb down. On slippery weedy slopes, I could easily fall. So I simply sat and slid down the slopes using my hands as pedals. When I got to the bottom, I found my trousers worn out in several places.



### **Joy in Climbing, Rather Than Reaching the Top**

A month later I took part in the second mountain climbing excursion. After the first trip, I had sworn I would never risk my neck so willingly again. But inwardly, I kept thinking about the exhilaration and stimulation. I said to myself, "Why worry when there are ropes to protect you?" So, eagerly, I found out about the time and location of the next mountain climbing trip.

Again we gathered at the same deserted quarry. Approaching those grotesque rocks, I felt none of the fear of the previous climb. Instead, I felt strangely close to the other team members. We were well equipped this time and the team was larger. Apart from Tian Yi and Kong Yunfeng, there were also Zhao Wei, He Xi and Xu Lei. All of them were experienced climbers, and I felt at ease in their presence.

The huge rock face we were going to climb was



virtually vertical. I felt dizzy just looking at it, but my friends all seemed relaxed. They prepared their safety belts, equipped themselves with all sorts of gadgets, and were ready to go.

Tian Yi, Xu Lei and He Xi skirted the rock and reached the top of it from behind. They secured the main and protecting ropes first and dropped them down to the ground. He Xi was the first to fix himself to the rope and abseiled down the face, his legs leaping against the rock. He reached the ground in a second. Tian Yi and Xu Lei followed suit. Now Zhao Wei was ready to climb. He told me that he had been fascinated by rock climbing when he was very small. He was now a very experienced rock climber. Agile, he knew exactly where to get footholds and where to find something to grasp. Before long, he was easily halfway up the rock.

The most difficult manoeuvre in rock climbing is getting over an outcrop that juts over you. This is known in climbing terms as a "negative angle". In a way, how you climb a negative angle is the criteria for determining how good a climber you are. Now Zhao Wei encountered such a negative angle on this rock. He pressed his body closely against a concave. Then, keeping himself there with the help of his shoulders, he used his hands to grab hold of the juttred rock overhead. He turned his body sideways and in a flash, brought both his legs over the outcrop. Unfortunately, he was so washed out by then he gave up when he was quite close to the top. When he got to the ground, he said, laughing, "In fact, what's important is not getting to the top, it is the process that enthrals me."

### Gusts of Wind Hamper Climbing

Twenty-six-year-old He Xi seemed to be addicted to mountain climbing and travelling. He was one of the four heroes who succeeded in climbing to the top of the snow-capped Harba Mountain in 1995. It was not all safe sailing, however. In 1994, during his first climb of the Harba Mountain, he encountered a hail which broke his skull, forcing him to give up. The following year, he tried again and succeeded. When talking about climbing, he said that mountain or rock climbing was in fact a matter of team work. It needed a co-operative spirit every step of the way. "I'm only a member of the team.



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I am not all on my own when climbing up a mountain," he said. This obviously came from the bottom of his heart. Once, he said to me, he almost killed himself when climbing up a cliff. As one of his feet moved away from its foothold, a rock he was holding came loose. He lost his balance and fell down along the rope. Xu Lei, who served as his protector down below, reacted quickly by pulling the rope with all his might. This saved He Xi's life. In order to participate in this trip, Xu Lei had to take leave for the day, for which he was fined 500 yuan by his employer. Xu said jokingly, "If I hadn't come today, I can't imagine how He Xi would have dealt with his climb!"

In fact He Xi was an outstanding mountain climber. He fixed a safety belt around himself, and attached it to the bracket of the main rope. When climbing up, you must put the main rope in front of your chest. It helps the climber to keep balance even if he falls off. It is impossible to predict what might happen while climbing. It would be even harder if your route was not carefully picked. He Xi rubbed a handful of powder into his palms to increase the friction. He then began to make his way up the rock. He attempted the same route three times, but could not escape the huge rock on which he found no foothold. He had to give up. When Xu Lei let go of the protecting rope, He Xi gracefully slipped down on to the ground.

The weather was unpredictable. A wind started blowing in the afternoon, and the main ropes kept swinging in mid air. Tian Yi, hanging in the middle, was turning like a wheel. He was actually an excellent rock climber, and knew how to choose a good route. Stretching out his right arm first, followed by his left, he then turned his backside, withdrew his feet and ascended. He failed this time, but it was not really his fault.

I was touched by those high-spirited friends, and really look forward to participating in their climbing activities again, so as to experience once more the exhilaration that one can only find in rock climbing.



*Translated by Wang Mingjie*

1. Challenging a negative angle
2. Rock climbing is definitely team work.
3. The enjoyable descent
4. After a successful manoeuvre





# ROULIANXIANG

## —THE FOLK DANCE AND ITS DISCIPLE

*Photos & article by Tan Yihua*

Living in Lichuan City, in the Enshi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, western Hubei Province, Wu Xiufu, a man in his late 60s, is the only disciple and artist of the folk dance Roulianxiang. The art, characterised by its distinctive ethnic style, typical local flavour and liveliness, is highly-appreciated by experts in the art circles and dance lovers at home and abroad.

When performing Roulianxiang (literally, "muscles producing continuous sound"), the dancers have to slap open hands on different parts of the bare body such as the head, shoulder, arm, elbow, chest, waist, leg, ankle and foot, creating rhythmic taps.

There are two theories concerning the origin of the dance. One is that it was derived from the funeral dance of the Ba people, ancestors of the Tujias now scattered in the western Hubei and eastern Sichuan provinces. During the late Shang Dynasty (16th-11th century B.C.), when Zhou Wuwang, the founder of the Western Zhou Dynasty (11th century-770 B.C.), tried to overthrow the tyrant Shang Zhou, the last

emperor of the Shang Dynasty, he joined forces with other allies in Muye. The Ba people, both remarkable performers and brave soldiers, became the vanguard of the army and fought fearlessly to help Zhou Wuwang defeat the enemy.

Witchcraft was popular in the Ba society at that time. During sacrificial ceremonies, sorcerers were invited to sing and dance to





entertain the gods. The sacrificial songs and dances of the witches have been preserved in some secluded villages around Enshi City. "Funeral Dance", also referred to as "Surrounding the Coffin",

is one such example. During a funeral, a group of male dancers, ranging from five to several dozen in number, sing and dance around the coffin following the beat of the drum and the instructions of the

requests were fulfilled.

Since the establishment of New China, Roulianxiang, be it originated from a funeral rite or a means of begging, has developed into a special folk dance with the encouragement of relevant departments of the government. The healthy and energetic Master Wu Xiufu, the only disciple of Roulianxiang, has injected a new life into the art. Apart from carrying forward the traditions of the dance, he has also brought about his own creations composed of 12 different sets of standard movements: twisting, turning, slapping, shaking and rolling, to name a few. He is good at deriving the elements of this art from this series of movements, creating the vocabulary of dance. Moreover, he has wiped out the unhealthy elements of the original version and replaced them with new



conductor. As the rhythm builds up to a climax, both the performers and the spectators become more excited, immersing themselves in the joy of the performance throughout the night. In this way, they celebrated the dead entering the next world.

Another theory relates Roulianxiang to a group of beggars called Nishendao. In the bygone days, some beggars lingering on the streets liked to cover their bare bodies with mud, hence their nickname, Nishendao (God of Mud). These Nishendao did not beg on the streets, but would walk up to the grand dwellings of the rich, murmuring a prayer while producing a rhythmic sound by slapping on the body to beg alms. If they were lucky enough to receive generous alms from the owner, they would say a few words of blessing and leave immediately. If they came across a Scrooge, however, they would slap on their body as quickly and loudly as possible to get rid of the mud until their

contents, such as combining clapping with the clicking of fingers and the tapping of the tongue on the hard palate to create a melodious symphony, presenting to the spectators both visual and aural enjoyment. Uniting the vivacious, smooth and unrestrained rhythm of Roulianxiang with the style and characteristics of varied folk dances, including the Tujia's funeral dancing, Wu has recreated the unique charm of this art.



These days, many people come to Lichuan to learn Roulianxiang from Master Wu. His students, totalling over 40,000, have spread this ancient and vivid oriental folk dance to not only every corner of China, but also to more than 20 foreign countries including Japan, Italy, Canada, America, England, France and Germany.

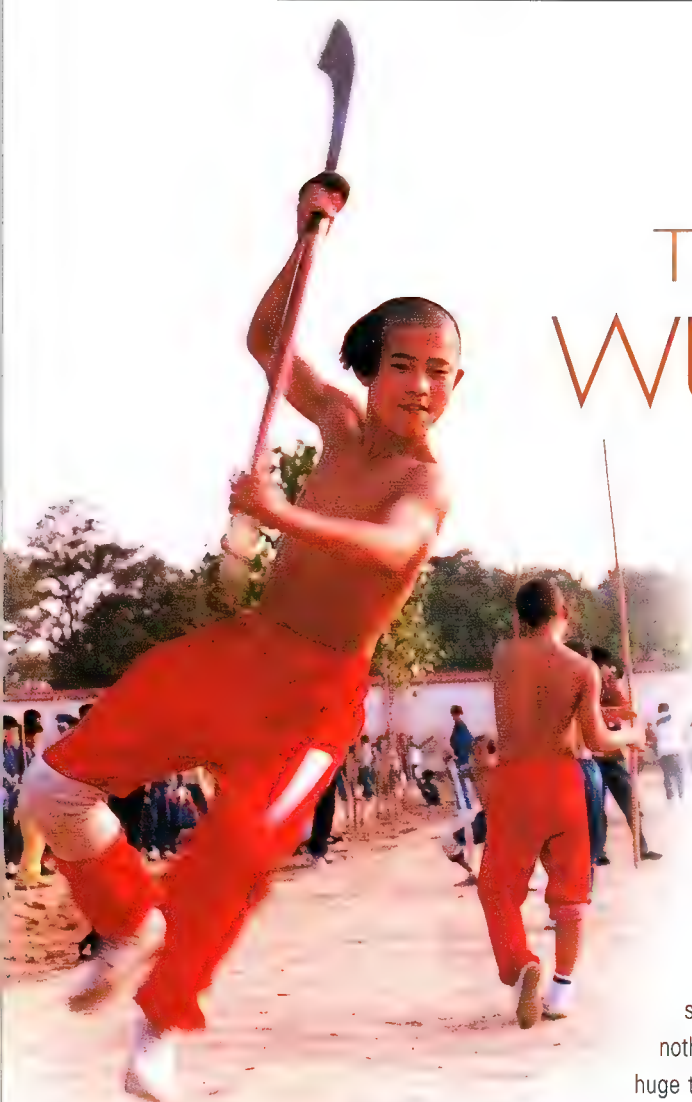
*Translated by Jess Tang*

1. Wu Xiufu — the master of the art
2. A scene from the two-person dance
3. Wu instructing his students
4. The group dance
5. Wu is favoured by the locals.



# THE YUNCHENG WUSHU SCHOOL

Photos & article by Tang Xumin



Since ancient times, Yuncheng in Shandong Province has produced many outstanding people and gallant heroes. One of the birthplaces of *wushu*, or Chinese martial art, it is also the home town of Song Jiang, the famous commander of a peasant group, as described in *The Outlaws of the Marsh*, which rose up against the oppressive Song-dynasty government in the 13th century. In 1985, the Songjiang Wushu School, a new type of school funded entirely by local people, was established in Yuncheng to teach both martial arts and cultural knowledge. Now, the school has an enrolment of more than 3,000 pupils from all parts of the country. They are divided into 36 classes, ranging from primary school to senior secondary school, in addition to 19 others that concentrate on wrestling, *wushu* and judo skills.

I recently visited Yuncheng to see the *wushu* school and the students in training. Entering the school gate, I first saw the life-size statues of Song Jiang and two other "Outlaw" heroes. On both sides of the statues were neatly hung knives, spears, swords, halberds, battle axes, and hooks, enticing even people who knew nothing about Chinese *wushu* to have a try. Thunderous shouting drew my attention to the huge training ground which occupies 50,000 square metres. It could hold 5,000 students altogether, though that day there were far less than that going through their movements.

When the pupils first came, they were just over seven years old. In the school they were given extremely strict training in basic skills. They were required to perform every movement 100 times. All the teachers had high expectations of their pupils, so whenever a pupil failed to perform a movement as requested, he or she







would be severely reprimanded or even caned. One of the teachers told me, "*Wushu* is a discipline that doesn't allow any laziness or petty tricks. Only those who train hard can achieve results."

At that moment, the *wushu* class ended. All the students, sweating, were exhausted and some even lay flat on the ground apparently devoid of energy. The bell for cultural classes then sounded and they all rushed to their classrooms, leaving the training ground completely empty. In a bright and spacious classroom, I found that, beside textbooks, exercise books and other study articles, the students also have either a club, a knife, or a sword with them — a unique feature of the *wushu* school.

Over the past decade, the school has sent over 400 students to the armed police, the Wuhan Physical Education College and the Beijing Physical Education University, as well as to the national and 20 local *wushu* teams in various provinces and cities. These graduates have won more than 300 gold, silver and bronze medals at various international, national and provincial martial art competitions.

Translated by Li Zhenguo

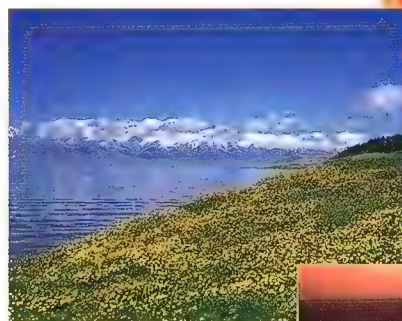


1. Every movement must be practised repeatedly and carefully.
2. At a competition held at the school
3. While practising *wushu*, these students are as gallant as the heroes of the "Outlaws" of the past.
4. Having swords, knives and clubs laid on the desk is a unique sight of this school.

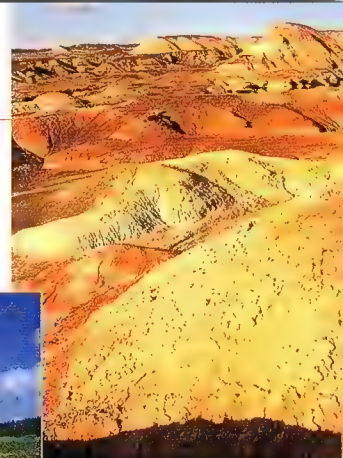


## 1. Seven-day Tour:

**Day 1: Ürümqi** After arriving, you'd better visit the city of Ürümqi first: enjoy the panoramic view of the city from the top of Hongshan Hill; see the thousand-year-old mummy and other cultural relics in the museum; visit a mosque; shop at the Erdaoqiao Nationality Commodities Market, buying a Uyghur cap, a Kazak hat or a cloak, which could well prove useful in your following travels. Return to the hotel in the evening and get your air ticket to Kashi.



The Junggar Basin  
(by Song Shijing)



Spring arrives in Xinjiang  
(by Song Shijing)



The Land of Xinjiang (by Sun Jiabin)

# Your Guided Tour of Xinjiang

Photos & article by Song Shijing

**Xinjiang is huge! It covers an area of 1.66 million square kilometres, accounting for about one-sixth of the total territory of China. There are enormous mountains, massive glaciers, boundless deserts, and vast expanses of grasslands...**

**Xinjiang has many nationalities! There are 17 ethnic groups in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region including the Han, Uygur, Kazak, Mongolian, Hui, Kirgiz, Tajik, Xibe, Ozbek, Manchu, Daur, Tatar and Russian. It is known as a "Museum of Nationalities".**

**The rich culture and art heritage of the old West Region, colourful folk customs and picturesque natural scenes make Xinjiang a unique place to visit. Because of the many attractions, you need to spend at least 14 days there to comprehensively explore the region, but if you are pushed for time, you can also manage to have a more compact seven-day tour.**

**Day 2: Ürümqi—Tianchi Lake—Kashi** Go to Bogda Peak in the morning to visit Tianchi Lake lying at an altitude of 1,950 metres above sea level, enjoying the scenery with snow peaks reflected in the clear water and Kazak felt houses dotting the surroundings. Return to Ürümqi at noon, and fly to Kashi, staying at the Seman Hotel.

**Day 3: Kashi—Pamir Plateau—Kashi** Travel by car to Muztagata, a snow capped mountain 180 kilometres from Kashi, on the Pamir Plateau. At the foot of the mountain you can have a Kirgiz meal, eating mutton with your fingers and tasting the buttered cakes. After the meal, you can visit the local people's felt houses and admire their embroidery. Return to Kashi the same day. Travelling from verdant Tianchi on the Tianshan Mountains to the roof of the world — Pamir, you will see the dramatic changes in the climate and geography. Though both the Kazak and Kirgiz are nomads, their customs vary drastically because of these differences.

**Day 4: Kashi—Ürümqi** In the morning, go to one of the largest and oldest bazaars (markets) in Kashi, where, besides buying folk handicrafts, you will also see the Uyghur customs. In the afternoon, visit Id Kah Mosque, the largest of its kind in Xinjiang, and the Tomb of the Imperial Concubine. You may have a chance to appreciate the Muslim architecture





and the customs in the ancient city of Kashi. Return to Ürümqi for the night.

**Day 5: Ürümqi—Turpan** In the morning go to Turpan, a basin surrounded by mountains. Visit Aydingkol Lake, which, with a water surface 154 metres below sea level, is the world's lowest lake after the Dead Sea in Jordan. The unique topography has created a dry desert climate. In summer there are over 40 days with the temperature exceeding 40°C (the highest recorded temperature being 47°C). The most attractive site in Turpan is a 100-kilometre-long sandstone mountain in the northern part of the basin. On a hot summer day, red rays radiate towards the sky like flames, hence its nickname, "Flaming Mountain". In the afternoon, go to the sand-treatment centre, four kilometres from downtown Turpan, or to an even larger one at Shanshan, 80 kilometres away, to cure arthritis, aching back and skin diseases through sand-burying treatment. In the evening, lodge at the Turpan Hotel, where you can go to a mini party, enjoying or taking part in the singing and dancing performances given by the Uygur youths.

**Day 6: Turpan—Gaochang Ancient City—Ürümqi** Visit scenic spots such as the ruins of Gaochang City, Asitana Tomb, Flaming Mountain, and Boziklik Thousand-Buddha Cave. Then, return to Ürümqi.

**Day 7: Ürümqi—Return home** Sightseeing in Ürümqi and leaving for home.

## 2. 14-day Tour:

After the seven-day tour, you may wish to continue your journey.

**Day 7: Ürümqi—Junggar Basin** Travel eastward around the Junggar Basin to the Karamaily Valley, where you can see the Multi-colour Bay and silicified woods. There is also a nature reserve for artiodactyls where you can see groups of Mongolian gazelles, wild horses, Asiatic wild asses and other animals.

**Days 8-10: Northern Junggar Basin** Travel along the highway to the north of Junggar Basin, and visit Ertix River, Benxian Lake and Kanas Lake. During these three days, you will see various picturesque scenes of lakes, rivers and mountains, including the 4,374-metre Friendship Peak, summit

of the Altay Mountains lying at the borders of China, Mongolia and Kazakhstan and Kanas Lake, imbedded in the middle of the luxuriant forests, 25 kilometres long and 2.9 kilometres wide. Ascending the Fish-Watching Pavilion, lucky visitors may catch a glimpse of the mysterious red fish in the lake.

**Day 11: Kanas Lake—North Kaba Scenic Area—Burqin County** After visiting Kanas Lake, go to see the North Kaba Scenic Area on the banks of Kaba River, lodging in the county town of Burqin at night.

**Day 12: Burqin—Ghost City—Karamay** Visit the Ghost City to the west of the Junggar Basin. On a land with a circumference of 10 kilometres, you will see fantastic "Yadan" formations created by nature through erosion by wind and sun. Many of them look like abandoned castles, hence the name. Lodge in Karamay, a city of the petroleum industry.

**Day 13: Karamay—Shihezi—Ürümqi** Visit Shihezi, a new city on the Gobi Desert. Drive around the Junggar Basin and return to Ürümqi.

**Day 14:** Sightseeing in Ürümqi and leaving for home.

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Translated by M. Q

### About the Guide:

Song Shijing, a reporter for the *Xinjiang Daily*, is very familiar with the natural scenes, cultural legacy and customs of Xinjiang. His publications include *Travel Notes of China's Xinjiang*, *Xinjiang*, *Turpan*, *Kashi* and other guidebooks and photo albums.



Kanas Lake (by Song Shijing)



A panoramic view of Ürümqi (by Liang Feng)



The Tomb of the Imperial Concubine in Kashi (by Song Shijing)



# Art Innovation

## in Blue and White Porcelain

Photos & article by Chen Liehan



1

**Innovation means making changes and creating.**

**Innovative blue and white porcelain combines the fantastic feeling and aesthetic taste of today's world with the characters of natural things such as insects, flowers and people; the key point is to enrich the in-depth emotion and contemporary feeling. The problem at the moment is the shortage of creativity on this frontier, which churns out endless copies of style, pattern and subjects. Nowadays, artists seem to lack any feeling of emotion.**





2

## Innovation — the Only Way Out

Given the changing times, I deeply believe that imitation and repetition can no longer appeal to today's people, and that innovation is the only way out.

When we look at the history and the rules of the development of blue and white porcelain, it is obvious that only innovation can create new ideas and varied subjects — imagination is required for the progress of this art.

Innovation does not mean breaking away entirely from tradition. Like a relay race, art develops by one generation taking over from the other. People are clambering up by means of stepping on the shoulders of their predecessors: no innovation can be made away from the basics of tradition.

## Tradition Is History

In my opinion, tradition is history, it is the innate temperament and spirit of blue and white porcelain over hundreds of years. We should inherit its essence and be impressed by its spirit.

I first learnt the traditional blue and white by copying a large number of masterpieces from Yuan, Ming and Qing dynasties, tapping its essences, absorbing its nutrition and understanding its spirit. In the process of imitation, I came to realise that to inherit the tradition, one has to innovate. There is no progress without innovation.

Innovation must not only inherit from tradition, it must also refer to the essences of other fine arts and continually absorb the nourishment for creation from real life.

Blue and white porcelain reached its peak during the Ming and Qing dynasties. How do we avoid copying the work of our predecessors while developing new dimensions, new forms and a new language?

I suggest we study traditional Chinese culture, explore the rules of blue and white and enhance our cultivation with the experience of our ancestors. We have to broaden our horizons, open up new forms of art, seek a modern expression that meets the contemporary aesthetic taste, understand oneself as an individual, update our ideas, plunge into the depth of life, collect raw material, have a good knowledge of the material and practise boldly.

## The Creation of Picking Lotus

The *Picking Lotus* vase illustrates what have discussed above in three aspects.

1) The subject — chosen to reflect today's features

The subject for *Picking Lotus* is based on real life in my hometown. The picture, its various figures and customary background, is full of the atmosphere of contemporary taste. Having grown up in a lotus producing area, I am familiar with the whole process of lotus production, from planting the roots to picking the seeds. When I designed this subject I focused on the women working in the lotus field — their happiness in

1. *A Year of Plenty*
2. *Picking Lotus*
3. *The Melody of Autumn*
4. *The Glamour of the Colour*



3



4



1. *Taking a break*
2. *Birds in the Woods*
3. *Lotus Flowers in the Sun Shine*



the harvest season and their expectation of a bright future. It is these people from real life that have provided me with the resource and spirit of art.

## 2) Composition — maximising artistic appeal

If you put the painting flat out on paper, 88 cm high and 104 cm wide, the composition, including the style, colour and layout, gives a wonderful sense of decoration, reflecting the terrific design. Both the density and space, the highs and lows, the large and small and the leading and supporting roles are all displayed in a proper way. The painting lends your eyes so many levels it seems to have a slowly beating rhythm, even though there is actually no sound. The figures are vivid, the lotus leaves and flowers are beautiful. Together, they form an appealing and charming picture.

It is very important when dealing with blue and white porcelain to understand the structure of the leading subject and the supporting ones. In the picture on this vase, the leading roles are arranged in the important part of the composition, using rich colours. The supporting elements are then added, such as the lotus flowers, the leaves and the waves of water, in the secondary visual.

*Picking Lotus* also tells many stories in the same layout. There is the episode in the morning when the women farmers are on the road to the field, and another at dusk when they all return. Although the subject, figures, lotus leaves and birds remain the same, the change of background emphasises the differences of time and mood.

## 3) Applying artistic treatment to imagination

In order to express the designer's imagination and to make the best use of the raw materials, the designer must make sure of a good combination of natural beauty and form beauty. In this painting, the figures, lotus, birds, fish and water waves are exaggerated in a certain way, some being stylised,



2



3

others summarised; the excellent result is a perfect integration of natural and abstract. Meanwhile, everything in this picture is simple, pure and flat, appealing to contemporary taste.

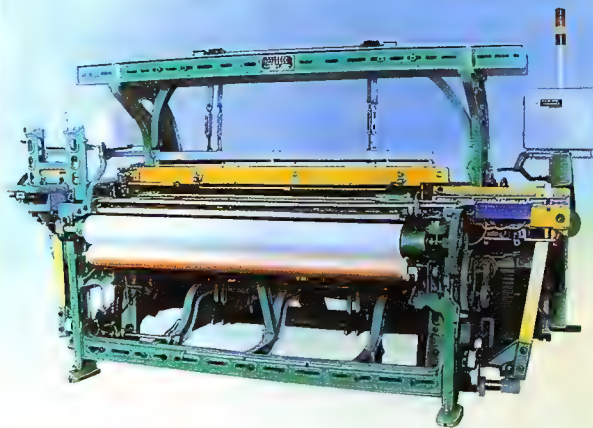
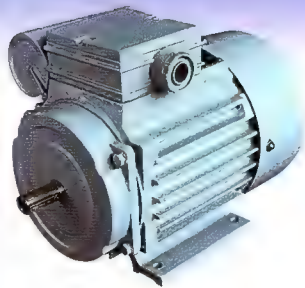
To show the beauty of blue and white porcelain in the easiest way, the artist must bring new spirit to the paint and fix up every part of the design more decoratively. There is a truly marvellous harmony of colour, style and insight in blue and white porcelain.

Blue and white porcelain is a creation within the constraints of the spirit and the material of the time. It inherits the past and catches hold of the present to create the future.

## About the Author

Chen Liehan, of Han nationality, was born in October 1992 in Guangchang County, Jiangxi Province. He graduated from the Jingdezhen Pottery and Porcelain Institute under the Ministry of Light Industries in 1987. In 1993, Chen received his MA degree from the Central Institute of Handicrafts and Art. He is now working with the China Handicrafts Import and Export General Company. Chen has won the honour of "Master of Handicraft Art", and is a member of the China Handicrafts Society, China Industrial Designers' Association and China Ancient Pottery Study Society. His work, a 22-piece coffee set, won the prize of excellent design of the 1989 Flying Golden Dragon Award.





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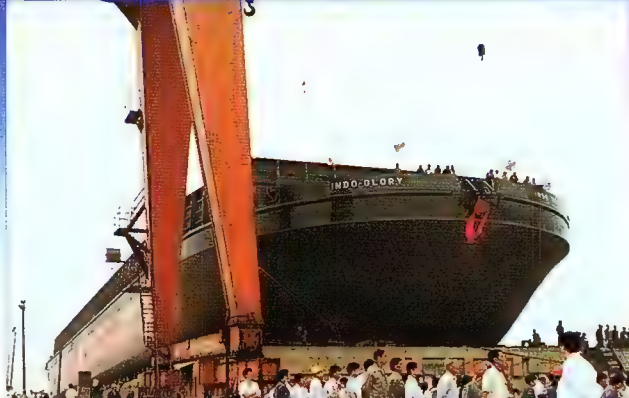
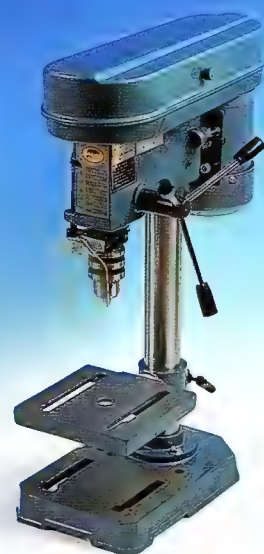
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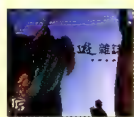
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- Traversing Lop Nur
- Baiyangdian Lake
- Villages in Yunnan
- The Bun Festival
- Aiming High in Life

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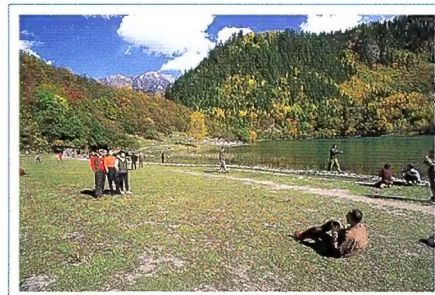
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**Jiuzhaigou** is famed for its captivating scenery, yet in the past it was an area that was very difficult to reach. That has all been changed since the completion of a new highway which brings visitors to **a new tourist route**. Our reporter will introduce you to the many scenic spots around the region, including the ruins of "Pompeii in China", devastated by an earthquake 60 years ago, and a secluded mountain area where the Tibetans living there are taller than 2.2 metres...



by Huang Yanhong

Chaozhou has three gems — Gongfu Tea, snacks and ceramics. This article features the **"Three Treasures of Chaozhou"**, the pride and joy of the Chaozhou people.



by Shi Baoxun



by Zhang Mingji

A group of painters went for a drive in the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, which turned out to be the most unforgettable experience in their lives. On the way, they drove past an enchanting canyon which they later found out was the **Shangri-La Gorge** they have always yearned for.

Visit the best place in the best season. Readers who share this ambition with us should not miss the **highlights of autumn scenery** in our next issue. Quite a number of locations are featured, including Zhongdian in Yunnan, Changbai Mountain in the Northeast, and Mount Lushan in Jiangxi. Moreover, two girls from Hong Kong trekked deep into the Northeast in pursuit of the enticing scenery there. Not only did they taste the chilly autumn in the north, but also experienced the hospitality of the northeastern people.



by Yin Xiang



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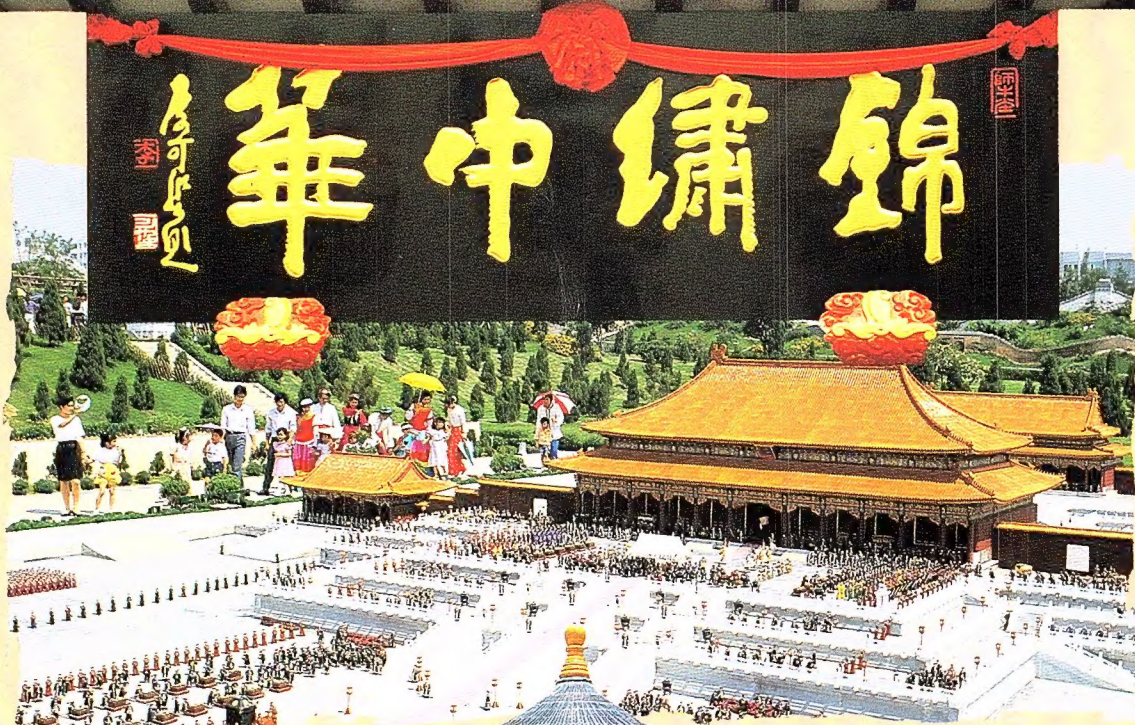


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